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THE



GOSPEL OF ST. MATTHEW

BY

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D.

VOLUME II

London

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LESSON XXVI.

The King's Table.

MATTHEW xiv. 13-21.

13. When Jesus heard of it, He departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard thereof, they followed Him on foot out of the cities.

14. And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and He healed their sick.

15. And when it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals.

16. But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat.

17. And they say unto Him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes.

18. He said, Bring them hither to Me.

19. And He commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, He blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to His disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

20. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.

21. And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

WHAT a contrast between Herod's banquet and this table spread in the wilderness! At the one, the heavy air reeked with the fumes of wine and blood; and lust, drunkenness, and murder were guests. At the other, the cool evening breeze from the lake played round the companies on the sweet springing grass. The fare was coarse and wholesome, the eaters awed into some dim recognition of the Giver, and He Himself re-

vealed as lovingly careful of humblest needs, as divinely able to satisfy these, and as, in deepest truth, the Bread of the world.

There are four stages in the narrative. Verses 13 and 14 show our Lord seeking solitude for Himself and His disciples, but patiently accepting the inrush of the curious crowd. Verses 15-18 report the preparatory conversation with the disciples. Verse 19 and the first half of verse 20 tell the fact and veil the manner of the miracle; and the remainder of the lesson narrates its sequel, in the abundance left for another day's need.

I. Matthew traces the withdrawal from Capernaum to the eastern side of the lake to the news of John Baptist's martyrdom. Luke tells us that Herod desired to see Jesus, and the resolve to avoid the tetrarch would be increased by the sad tidings. Mark adds a second motive for the passage, in the wish to secure a period of quiet for the apostles who had just returned from their missionary tour. No doubt rest would be as grateful to Him as to them, "for there were many coming and going, and there was no leisure so much as to eat." Like so many of us hard-driven workers, Jesus sighed for a little quiet, and sought it among the lonely hills. He went by boat, to make sure of being alone with His immediate followers, and, as John informs us, betook Himself to the mountain on landing. But the curious crowds see where the boat is making for, and hurry after Him round the head of the lake. They outwent Him, but do not seem to have reached the landing-place in time to follow Him among the folds of the hills, for it was not till He "came forth"—from some brief repose in "the mountain"—that He saw the crowds, swollen by pilgrims to

the Passover, which was nigh "at hand." No impatience at their importunate curiosity flushes His cheek. Without a sigh He puts away the hope of rest and stillness, though He knew how idle and shallow the motives were which had brought them to disturb His seclusion. How many of us would take a like intrusion on our "holidays" in the same fashion? Christ's thought on seeing a crowd was always pity. In this case Mark tells us why. They looked to Him like a huddled herd of shepherdless sheep. In their rude racing after Him, He saw a mute confession of how much they needed, and how blindly they longed for any guidance, and how pathetically ready they were to stream after any one who looked the least like the shepherd whom they required so much. Nothing betrays more plainly men's incapacity to guide themselves, and their lack of discernment, than their eager following of leaders, even though it be often mere craving for excitement or amusement which sets them running. A great multitude is ever a sad sight to an eye that sees. But Christ never indulged in emotions which did not lead to work. So, putting away all thoughts of His purpose in crossing the lake, He begins another day of toil, both healing, as Matthew tells us, and teaching "many things," as Mark gives it.

II. The earlier "evening"—from the ninth to the twelfth hour—draws on, while He is still engrossed in His work. He is not noting time, nor conscious of hunger, but the disciples are. They break in upon Him with a piece of "strong common sense," which, as is often the way when scholars try to set their masters right, was barely respectful. They inform Him of two very obvious facts, which He possibly knew already,—that they were

in "a desert place," and that it was getting late ; and they bid Him adopt "practical" measures, which from their standpoint were the only means of meeting the difficulty, which they manifestly think had never presented itself to Him. He had thought about that hours ago, as we learn from John, and had dropped a question into Philip's mind, which had been working there all day. The apostles' suggestion, which shows them singularly anxious about wants which the crowd had not yet felt, seems to imply their knowledge of Christ's words to Philip. He had said, "Whence shall we buy bread?" Does not "buy themselves bread" sound like an answer, the result of a day's united thinking, just as the mention of the "two hundred pennyworth," in Philip's reply in the earlier conversation, is reiterated in their answer to our Lord's next injunction, as Mark gives it? Be that as it may, the fault of their words was the implication that Jesus needed to be recalled by them to care for the hungry multitude, and the brusque boldness of their prescribing a course to Him. It was no fault that they did not reckon on a miracle ; but it was a fault that they supposed they knew best how to provide food. They knew that the time was gone and the place a desert, but, as Chrysostom says, they forgot that He who feeds the world and is not subject to time was there. If they had fully learned the meaning of all that they had seen Him do, they would not have spoken thus.

Our Lord's answer is studiously enigmatical, and meant to stimulate attention and anticipation. It consists of an apparently incredible assurance and an obviously impossible command. "They need not depart." This calm

assurance, so contrary to the disciples' knowledge of the scanty stores, must have made them feel that He Himself knew what He should do, and meditated some work beyond their expectation. On his lips, promises for which sense sees no warrant or ground are an aid and call to faith. "Give ye them to eat" was directly intended to send them to count their resources, and, by forcing the inadequacy of these home, to drive to dependence on Him. It also paved the way for their actual employment as distributors of the bread. The words may well be applied to the relation of Christians to the world. There is no need for men to go away from Christ for the satisfaction of all true wants. There should be no need to go away from Christ's servants. The Church has in trust more than enough to still a world's cravings, and has it in command to give them to eat. But it is too often ready to send the multitudes somewhere else to buy for themselves. Seeking souls should be able to find in the Church's presentation of Christ what they would assuredly find in Him,—the answer to all their desires, the school for all their faculties, a sufficient field of action, a home for their hearts. If we drive them elsewhere for bread, and they get innutritious stone for loaves, and poisonous serpents for fish, the fault is ours as much as theirs. If we give them to eat, they will not want to go away.

The next turn in the conversation gives the disciples' summing up of their poor resources and the way to make their insufficiency sufficient. The loaves and fishes were probably the modest supply which they had laid in for their own wants. It was not more than enough for one meal for twelve men, and was coarse as well as

scanty fare. They and their Master lived as poor men. Little as it was, He calls them to give up their own provision to the people about whom they had been so anxious a minute ago. They are not unwilling be that put to their credit,—but cheerfully bring it. How much smaller than ever it must have looked, as it lay spread out on the grass at His feet, over against five thousand hungry mouths ! When Christ prescribes large duties, He means to send us to take stock of our resources, and to lay their poverty to heart. The knowledge of our own unfitness is the first condition of fitness. But it is only so when it sends us to Him with our small provision in our hands. Otherwise the consciousness may easily degenerate into cowardly, ease-loving shrinking from plain duty, selfishness masquerading in the garb of humility. If we are really penetrated by the sense of our own unfitness, we shall spread it before Him, and let Him decide whether it is such as to absolve us from the service or no.

III. Then comes the miracle, of which the accompaniments are narrated with a detailed picturesqueness which brings into striking relief the absolute silence as to the essential manner of it. In the early spring before the Passover, the young grass made better couches than were spread at Herod's banquet, and three of the four evangelists notice it. All record, too, the command to make the men sit down. The guests were seated before the table was spread ; and, no doubt, it was the singularity of their all being marshalled, when there appeared nothing to eat, that struck the narrators. One can fancy the looks of surprise, and, on some faces, of ridicule, as they took their places. It was a trial of

faith, in a fashion ; and perhaps there were some who said, "What nonsense ! What are we to sit down here for, with no food but these five loaves ?" Here and there might be a scoffer, but a certain hushed expectancy would be created by the process of seating, and, as John's account gives it, "the men sat down. . . Jesus therefore took the loaves." It was a test ; and this obedience, which had in it an element of faith, was rewarded by the miracle.

It is useless to ask where was the point at which the miraculous multiplication came in. Most probably it was as the broken pieces of the thin, flat loaves passed from Christ's hands. One feels that it was more fitting that His touch should produce the increase than that it should take place in the process of distribution by the disciples. But, as is always the case, there is no attempt to elucidate the manner of the miracle. The preliminaries and the accompaniments are told at full length. The fact and Christ's agency are made plain. The attestations in the substantial shape of five thousand full men and twelve baskets of broken pieces are put in evidence. But the act itself is shrouded in darkness. Only we see Him looking up to heaven, not as a Moses or a Paul might have done before their miracles, but in token of His unbroken union with the Father, and giving thanks as the Head of this strangely gathered family, and then veiling His own power behind the active ministrations of His servants.

The miracle has a double significance : first, it is a revelation of Him as the continued Food-Giver by the course of providence. It was a transient manifestation to sense of an eternal fact. His will wrought then,

without other causes, on material bread, and increased it. His will works ever in the material order of things, and, through the so-called "natural" processes of vegetation and the actions of men, provides our daily bread. For this is the deepest truth of the physical world, that all its changes are the direct result of the divine will ; and this is the deepest truth concerning the relation of that will to Jesus, that He is the channel through which it all flows, "the arm of the Lord," the medium of all creation and of the preservation of every creature. "In Him all things consist."

The miracle is also a symbol of Him as the Bread of Life. This is His own interpretation of it in John's Gospel. His flesh and blood are the true nourishment of the soul. Faith takes this bread, when it rests on His sacrifice for the world, and so incorporates Him into our inmost natures that He becomes the source, as well as the nourishment, of our new life. Other bread but sustains life already possessed, and does so by being assimilated to the life which it feeds. This bread of God first imparts the life which it feeds, and feeds it by assimilating the life to its food. All our nature must feed on Him—the will on His commandments, the understanding on His revelation of truth, the heart on His love, the conscience on His atonement ; and the quintessence of all this nutriment for the human spirit is in the body broken and the blood shed for the life of the world.

IV. The last point in the narrative is the satisfaction of all who ate, and the abundance over. Three of the four evangelists say, in almost identical words, "They did all eat, and were filled." Christ's gifts are for all. As on the green grass there were men, women, and children ;

so all ages, conditions, diversities of character, rank, culture, and circumstance, may find the satisfaction of their soul's hunger in Him. The world spreads a table at which there is often satiety without satisfaction, and oftener hunger surviving after all vain attempts to make husks serve for bread. "It shall be as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold he eateth ; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty." Christ's feast satisfies, but never cloys. The world often cloys, but never satisfies. Further, His gift is inexhaustible. After five thousand have fed, full more is over than appeared at first. Each servant who dispensed the store bears away in his basket more than there was to begin with. "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth." This gift "doth stretch itself as 'tis received." It was the "broken pieces" which Christ had broken that were gathered up ; and the lesson taught thereby is not only that of the utmost fullness in His bestowing combined with the utmost economy in His administration, but also that he provides at every moment, in the greatness of His love, more than we can, at the moment, exhaust ; and that therefore we may store up the overplus of His gift, the portions broken up by His hands and not consumed, and find in them food for many days. In His earliest gift lies a certain residue beyond what we can then appropriate which will nourish our souls hereafter. Let us, then, garner up the bread of God, assured that we have all which we need for the future in that which satisfies the present hunger, and that we shall never exhaust its fullness, nor bring away empty platters nor hungry lips from the table where the King feasts His servants,

LESSON XXVII.

The King's Highway.

MATTHEW xiv. 22-36.

22. And straightway Jesus constrained His disciples to get into a ship, and to go before Him unto the other side, while He sent the multitudes away.

23. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, He was there alone.

24. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.

25. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

26. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.

27. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

28. And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water.

29. And He said, Come. And when Peter was come down

out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

30. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

31. And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

32. And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.

33. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped Him, saying, Of a truth Thou art the Son of God.

34. And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret.

35. And when the men of that place had knowledge of Him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto Him all that were diseased;

36. And besought Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.

THE haste and urgency with which the disciples were sent away, against their will, after the miracle of feeding the five thousand, is explained in John's

account. The crowd had been excited to a dangerous enthusiasm by a miracle so level to their tastes. A prophet who could feed them was something like a prophet. So they determine to make Him a king. Our Lord, fearing the outburst, resolves to withdraw into the lonely hills, that the fickle blaze may die down. If the disciples had remained with him, he could not have so easily stolen away, and they might have caught the popular fervour. To divide would distract the crowd and make it easier for Him to disperse them, while many of them, as really happened, would be likely to set off by land for Capernaum when they saw that the boat had gone. The main teaching of this miracle, over and above its demonstration of the messianic power of our Lord, is symbolical. All the miracles are parables, and this eminently so. Thus regarding it, we have

I. The struggling toilers and the absent Christ. They had a short row of some five or six miles in prospect, when they started in the early evening. An hour or so might have done it, but, for some unknown reason, they lingered. Perhaps instead of pulling across, they may have kept in-shore, by the head of the lake, expecting Jesus to join them at some point. Thus, night finds them but a short way on their voyage. The paschal moon would be shining down on them, and perhaps in their eager talk about the miracle they had just seen, they did not make much speed. A sudden breeze sprang up, as is common at nightfall on mountain lakes ; and soon a gale, against which they could make no headway, was blowing in their teeth. This lasted for eight or nine hours. Wet and weary, they tugged at the oars through the livelong night, the seas breaking over them, and the

wind howling down the glens. They had been caught in a similar storm once before, but then He was on board, and it was daylight. Now "it was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them." How they would look back at the dim outline of the hills, where they knew He was, and wonder why He had sent them out into the tempest alone! Mark tells us that He saw them distressed hours before He came to them, and that makes His desertion the stranger. It is but His method of lovingly training them to do without His personal presence, and a symbol of what is to be the life of His people till the end. He is on the mountain in prayer, and He sees the labouring boat and the distressed rowers. The contrast is the same as is given in the last verses of Mark's Gospel, where the serene composure of the Lord, sitting at the right hand of God, is sharply set over against the wandering, toiling lives of His servants, in their evangelistic mission. The commander-in-chief sits apart on the hill, directing the fight, and sending regiment after regiment to their deaths. Does that mean indifference? So it might seem but for the words which follow, "the Lord working with them." He shares in all the toil; and the lifting up of His holy hands sways the current of the fight, and inclines the balance. His love appoints effort and persistent struggle as the law of our lives. Nor are we to mourn or wonder; for the purpose of the appointment, so far as we are concerned, is to make character, and to give us "the threshing thews that throw the world." Difficulties make men of us. Summer sailors, yachting in smooth water, have neither the joy of conflict nor the vigour which it gives. Better the darkness, when we cannot see our way, and the wind in our faces, if the

good of things is to be estimated by their power to "strengthen us with strength in our soul."

II. We have the approaching Christ. Not till the last watch of the night does He come, when they have long struggled, and the boat is out in the very middle of the lake, and the storm is fiercest. We may learn from this the delays of His love. Because He loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus, He stayed still, in strange inaction, for two days, after their message. Because He loved Peter and the praying band, He let him lie in prison till the last hour of the last watch of the last night before his intended execution, and then delivered him with a leisureliness (making him put on article after article of dress) which tells of conscious omnipotence. Heaven's clock goes at a different rate from our little timepieces. God's day is a thousand years, and the longest tarrying is but "a little while." When He has come, we find that it is "right early," though before He came He seemed to us to delay. He comes across the waves. Their restless and yielding crests are smoothed and made solid by the touch of His foot. "He walketh on the sea as on a pavement" (Septuagint version of Job ix. 8). It is a revelation of divine power. It is one of the very few miracles affecting Christ's own person, and may perhaps be regarded as being, like the transfiguration, a casual gleam of latent glory breaking through the body of His humiliation, and so, in some sense, prophetic. But it is also symbolic. He ever uses tumults and unrest as a means of advancing His purposes. The stormy sea is the recognised Old Testament emblem of antagonism to the divine rule; and just as He walked on the billows, so does He reach His end by the very

opposition to it, “girding Himself” with the wrath of men, and making it to praise Him. In this sense, too, His “paths are in the great waters.” In another aspect, we have here the symbol of Christ’s using our difficulties and trials as the means of His loving approach to us. He comes, giving a deeper and more blessed sense of His presence, by means of our sorrows, than in calm sunny weather. It is generally over a stormy sea that He comes to us. And golden treasures are thrown on our shores after a tempest.

III. We have the terror and the recognition. The disciples were little lifted yet above their fellows ; they had no expectation of His coming, and thought just what any rude minds would have thought, that this mysterious thing stalking towards them across the waters came from the unseen world, and probably that it was the herald of their drowning. The terror froze their blood, and brought out a shriek (as the word might be rendered) which was heard above the dash of waves and the raving wind. They had gallantly fought the tempest, but this unmanned them. We too often mistake Christ when He comes to us. We do not recognise His working in the storm, nor His presence in the power to battle with it. We are so absorbed in the circumstances that we fail to see Him through them. Our tears weave a veil which hides Him, or the darkness obscures His face, and we see nothing but the threatening crests of the waves, curling high above our little boat. We mistake our best Friend, and we are afraid of Him, as we dimly see Him ; and sometimes we think that the tokens of His presence are only phantasms of our own imagination.

They who were deceived by His appearance knew Him by His voice, as Mary did at the sepulchre. How blessed must have been the moment when that astounding certitude thrilled through their souls! That low voice is audible through all the tumult. He speaks to us by His word, and by the silent speech in our spirits, which makes us conscious that He is there. He does speak to us in the deepest of our sorrows, in the darkest of our nights; and when we hear His voice, and answer "It is the Lord," the sorrow is soothed, and the darkness is light about us.

"Well roars the storm to those who hear
A deeper voice across the storm."

The consciousness of His presence banishes all fear. "Be not afraid" follows "It is I." It is of no use to preach courage unless we preach Christ first. If we have not Him with us, we do well to fear; His presence is the only rational foundation for calm fearlessness. Only when the Lord of hosts is with us ought we not to fear, "though the waters roar . . . and be troubled." "Through the dear might of Him that walked the waves" can we feeble creatures face all terrors, and feel no terror.

IV. We have next the venturesomeness and collapse of Peter's confidence. The motives for his request, "Bid me come unto thee," were mingled. His impetuosity, his love of being singled out from the rest, his self-confidence, perhaps a kind of boyish delight in doing so strange a thing, tainted it. It is a rehearsal of "although all shall be offended, yet will not I." It is the same pushing into unnecessary peril as when he shouldered his way up to the fire of coals in the high priest's palace.

But the nobler elements of faith in Christ's power, and of eager desire to be beside Him, throb in the unconsidered wish. It is the same instinctive love which sent him floundering through the water on that other morning on the lake. He must get to His side ; whether on or in the sea matters little. So his cry is, " Bid me come unto Thee !" and it is redeemed from blame because it is the cry of faith, though it be mingled with presumption, and of love, though it be stained with self-regard. The brief grave permission " Come " does not wholly approve, but Christ wishes Peter to learn the lesson, which nothing else but the attempt would teach him. How the others must have gazed, as the venturesome disciple must have lowered himself over the side, and first put his foot on the strange pavement ! He is upborne. How ? By the will of Christ, who thus makes His servant sharer of His own prerogative, and therein shows us in symbol the blessed truth that union with Him gives us share in His royalties, and will one day make the body of His glory the pattern to which ours shall be conformed. But the impurities that mingled with Peter's faith soon begin to tell. The mere human presumption ebbs out of him, as he feels the force of the wind, and begins to realise his position. It was blowing no harder now than when He was on board, but, naturally enough, it howled more menacingly in his ears. So he is afraid ; and because he is, he begins to sink. Why ? Because he had been kept up only by the power of Christ, which could operate on him only on condition of his faith. If he had been firm of faith, he could have stood ; for it was not the violence of the storm, but the tremulousness of his confidence,

that was letting him slowly down. To look at Christ keeps faith in exercise, and our faith admits His sustaining power. To look off to the stormy waters sends terror to the heart, and that shuts the entrance by which His power can come to us. The very spirit of this incident is translated into accurate language by Peter himself,—“kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.” His cry is mingled faith and fear. If he had not doubted, he would not have cried; if he had not believed, he would not have cried, “Lord, save me.” How lovingly our Lord passes by its imperfections, and answers the terrified exclamation, by laying hold of him with His own hand, before He utters His gentle remonstrance! And how tenderly He rebukes, not for daring too much, but for daring too little; not for venturing out of the ship, but for not holding “fast the beginning” of his confidence “firm unto the end”! The smile of tenderness on His face, as He spoke thus to the rescued disciple, whose safety was the best proof of the unreasonableness of his fear, would be like that with which He will repeat the same loving question to each of us when He welcomes us home at last, and we shall have as little to say in answer as Peter had when safe in the boat.

V. We have the end of the storm and of the voyage. The storm ceases as soon as Jesus is on board. John does not mention the cessation, but tells us that they were immediately at the shore. It does not seem necessary to suppose another miracle, but only that the voyage ended very speedily. It is not always true that His presence is the end of dangers and difficulties, but the consciousness of His presence does hush the storm. The worst of trouble is gone when we know that He

shares it ; and though the long swell after the gale may last, it no longer threatens. Nor is it always true that His coming, and our consciousness that He has come, bring a speedy close to toils. We have to labour on, but in how different a mood these men would bend to their oars after they had Him on board ! With Him beside us toil is sweet, the burdens are lighter, and the road is shortened. Even with Him on board life is a stormy voyage ; but without Him, it ends in shipwreck. With Him, it may be long, but it will look all the shorter while it lasts, and when we land the rough weather will appear but a transient squall. These wearied rowers, who had toiled all night, stepped on shore as the morning broke on the eastern bank. So we, if we have had Him for our shipmate, shall land on the eternal shore, and dry our wet garments in the sunshine, and all the stormy years that seemed so long shall be remembered but as a watch in the night.

LESSON XXVIII.

The Crumbs and the Bread.

MATTHEW XV. 21-31.

21. Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

22. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto Him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

23. But he answered her not a word. And His disciples came and besought Him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

24. But He answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

25. Then came she and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me.

26. But He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.

27. And she said, Truth,

Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

28. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

29. And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there.

30. And great multitudes came unto Him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and He healed them:

31. Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.

THE King of Israel has passed beyond the bounds of Israel, driven by the hostility of those who should have been His subjects. The delegates of the priestly party from Jerusalem, who had come down to see into this dangerous enthusiasm which was beginning

in Galilee, have made Christ's withdrawal expedient, and He goes northward, if not actually into the territory of Tyre and Sidon, at any rate to the border land. The incident of the Syro-Phoenician woman becomes more striking if we suppose that it took place on Gentile ground. At all events, after it, we learn from Mark that He made a considerable circuit, first north and then east, and so came round to the eastern side of the sea of Galilee, where the last paragraph of this lesson finds Him. The key to its meaning lies in the contrast between the single cure of the woman's demoniac daughter, obtained after so long imploring, and the spontaneous abundance of the cures wrought when He had again Jewish sufferers to do with, even though it were on the half-Gentilised eastern shore of the lake. The contrast is an illustration of His parable of the crumbs that fell from the table, and the plentiful feast that was spread upon it for the children.

The story of the Syro-Phoenician woman naturally falls into four parts, each marked by the recurrence of "He answered."

I. There is the piteous cry, and the answer of silence. Mark tells us that Jesus sought concealment in this journey; but distress has quick eyes, and this poor woman found Him. Canaanite as she is, and thus a descendant of the ancient race of Israel's enemies, she has learned to call Him the Son of David, owning His kingship, which His born subjects disowned. She beseeches for that which He delighted to give, identifying herself with her poor child's suffering, and asking as for herself His mercy. As Chrysostom says, "It was a sight to stir pity to behold a woman calling aloud in such

distress, and that woman a mother, and pleading for a daughter, and that daughter in such evil plight." In her humility she does not bring her child, nor ask Him to go to her. In her agony, she has nothing to say but to spread her grief before Him, as thinking that He, of whose pity she has heard, needs but to know in order to alleviate, and requires no motives urged to induce Him to help. In her faith, she thinks that His power can heal from afar. What more could He have desired? All the more startling, then, is His demeanour. All the conditions which He usually required were present in her; but He, who was wont to meet these with swift and joyful over-answers, has no word to say to this poor, needy, persevering, humble, and faithful suppliant. The fountain seems frozen from which such streams of blessing were wont to flow. His mercy seems clean gone, and His compassion to have failed. A Christ silent to a sufferer's cry is a paradox which contradicts the whole gospel story, and which, we may be very sure, no evangelist would have painted, if he had not been painting from the life.

II. The disciples' intercession answered by Christ's statement of the limitations of His mission. Their petition evidently meant, "Dismiss her by granting her request;" they knew in what fashion He was wont to "send away" such suppliants. They seem, then, more pitiful than He is. But their thoughts are more for themselves than for her. That "us" shows the cloven foot. They did not like the noise, and they feared it might defeat His purpose of secrecy; and so, by their phrase "send her away," they unconsciously betray that what they wanted was not granting the prayer, but

getting rid of the petitioner. Perhaps, too, they mean, "Say something to her—either tell her that Thou wilt or that Thou wilt not ; break Thy silence somehow." No doubt it was intensely disagreeable to have a shrieking woman coming after them ; and they were only doing as most would have done, and as so many of us do, when we give help without one touch of compassion, in order to stop some imploring mouth.

Their apparently compassionate but really selfish intercession was put aside by the answer, which explains the paradox of His silence. It puts emphasis on two things : His subordination to the divine will of the Father, and the restrictions imposed thereby on the scope of His beneficent working. He was obeying the divine will in confining His ministry to the Jewish people, as we know that He did. Clearly, that restriction was necessary. It was a case of concentration in order to diffusion. The fire must be gathered on the hearth, if it is afterward to warm the chamber. There must be geographical and national limits to His life ; and the Messiah, who comes last in the long series of the kings and prophets, can only be authenticated as the world's Messiah by being first the fulfiller to the children of the promises made to the fathers. The same necessity, which required that revelation should be made through that nation, required that the climax and fulfiller of all revelation should limit His earthly ministry to it. This limitation must be regarded as applying only to His own personal ministry. It did not limit His sympathies, nor interfere with His consciousness of being the Saviour and King of the whole world. He had already spoken the parables which claimed it all for the area of the development of

His kingdom, and in many other ways had given utterance to His consciousness of universal dominion, and His purpose of universal mercy. But He knew that there was an order of development in the kingdom, and that at its then stage the surest way to attain the ultimate universality was rigid limitation of it to the chosen people. This conviction locked His gracious lips against even this poor woman's piteous cry. We may well believe that His sympathy outran His commission, and that it would have been hard for so much love to be silent in the presence of so much sorrow, if He had not felt the solemn pressure of that divine necessity which ruled all His life. He was bound by His instructions, and therefore He answered her not a word. Individual suffering is no reason for transcending the limits of God-appointed functions ; and He is absolved from the charge of indifference who refrains from giving help, which He can only give by overleaping the bounds of His activity, which have been set by the Father.

III. We have, next, the persistent suppliant answered by a refusal which sounds harsh and hopeless. His former words were probably not heard by the woman, who seems to have been behind the group. She saw that something was being said to Him, and may have gathered, from gestures or looks, that His reply was unfavourable. Perhaps there was a short pause in their walk, while they spoke, during which she came nearer. Now she falls at His feet, and, with "beautiful shamelessness," as Chrysostom calls it, repeats her prayer, but this time with pathetic brevity, uttering but the one cry, "Lord, help me." The intenser the feeling, the fewer the words. Heart prayers are short prayers. She does

not now invoke Him as the Son of David, nor tell her sorrow over again, but flings herself in desperation on His pity, with the artless and unsupported cry, wrung from her agony, as she sees the hope of help fading away. Like Jacob, in His mysterious struggle, “she wept, and made supplication unto Him.”

As it would seem, her distress touched no chord of sympathy; and from the lips accustomed to drop oil and wine into every wound, came words like swords, cold, unfeeling, keen-edged, fitted and meant to lacerate. We shall not understand them, or Him, if we content ourselves with the explanation which jealousy for His honour as compassionate and tender has led many to adopt, that He meant all the long delay in granting her request, and the words which He spoke, only as tests of her faith. His refusal was a real refusal, founded on the divine decree, which He was bound to obey. His words to her, harsh as they unquestionably sound, are but another way of putting the limitation which He had just insisted on in His answer to the disciples. The “bread” is the blessing which He, as the sent of God brings; the “children” are the “lost sheep of the house of Israel;” the “dogs” are the Gentile world. The meaning of the whole is simply the necessary restriction of His personal activity to the chosen nation. It is not meant to wound nor to insult, though, no doubt, it is cast in a form which might have been offensive, and would have repelled a less determined or less sorrowful heart. The form may be partly explained by the intention of trying her earnestness, which, though it be not the sole, or even the principal, is a subordinate reason of our Lord’s action. But it is also to be considered

in the light of the woman's quick-witted retort, which drew out of it an inference which we cannot suppose that Christ did not intend. He uses a diminutive for "dogs," which show that He is not thinking of the fierce, unclean animals, masterless and starving, that still haunt Eastern cities, and deserve their bad character, but of domestic pets, who live with the household, and are near the table. In fact, the woman seized His intention much better than later critics who find "national scorn" in the words ; and the fair inference from them is just that which she drew, and which constituted the law of the preaching of the gospel,—"To the Jew first, and also to the Gentile."

IV. We have the woman's retort, which wrings hope out of apparent discouragement, answered by Christ's joyful granting of her request. Out of His very words she weaves a plea. "Yes, Lord ; I am one of the dogs ; then I am not an alien, but belong to the household." The Revised Version does justice to her words by reading "for even" instead of "yet." She does not enter a caveat against the analogy, but accepts it wholly, and only asks Him to carry out His own metaphor. She takes the sword from His hand, or, as Luther says, "she catches Him in His own words." She does not ask a place at the table, nor anything taken from those who have a prior claim to a more abundant share in His mercies. A crumb is enough for her, which they will never miss. In other and colder words, she acquiesces in the divine appointment which limits His mission to Israel ; but she recognises that all nations belong to God's household, and that she and her countrymen have a real, though for the time inferior, position in it. She pleads that her gain will not be the children's loss, nor the

answer to her prayers an infraction of the spirit of His mission. Perhaps, too, there may be a reference to the fact of His being there on Gentile soil, in her words “which fall from the children’s table.” She does not want the bread to be thrown from the table to her. She is not asking Him to transfer His ministry to Gentiles ; but here He is. A crumb has fallen, in His brief visit. May she not eat of that ? In this answer faith, humility, perseverance, swift perception of His meaning, and hallowed ingenuity and boldness, are equally admirable. By admitting that she was “a dog,” and pleading her claim on that footing, she shows that she was “a child.” And therefore, because she has shown herself one of the true household, in the fixedness of her faith, in the meekness of her humility, in the persistence of her prayers, Christ joyfully recognises that here is a case in which He may pass the line of ordinary limitation, and that, in doing so, He does not exceed His commission. Such faith is entitled to the fullest share of His gift. She takes her place beside the Gentile centurion as the two recipients of commendation from Him for the greatness of their faith. It had seemed as if He would give nothing ; but He ends with giving all, putting the key of the storehouse into her hand, and bidding her take, not a crumb, but “as thou wilt.” Her daughter is healed, by His power working at a distance ; but that was not, we may be very sure, the last nor the best of the blessings which she took from that great treasure of which He made her mistress. Nor can we doubt that He rejoiced at the removal of the barrier which dammed back His help, as much as she did at the abundance of the stream which reached her at last.

V. The final verses of our lesson give us a striking contrast to this story. Jesus is again on the shores of the lake, after a tour through the Tyrian and Sidonian territory, and then eastwards, and southwards to its eastern bank. There He, as on several former occasions, seeks seclusion and repose in the hills, which is broken in upon by the crowds. The old excitement and rush of people begins again. And large numbers of sick, "lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others," are brought. They are cast "down at His feet" in hot haste, with small ceremony, and, as would appear, with little petitioning for His healing power. But the same grace, for which the Canaanitish woman had needed to plead so hard, now seems to flow almost unasked. She had, as it were, wrung a drop out; now it gushes abundantly. She had not got her "crumb" without much pleading; these get the bread almost without asking. It is this contrast of scant and full supplies which the evangelist would have us observe. And He points His meaning plainly enough by that expression "they glorified the God of Israel," which seems to be Matthew's own, and not His quotation of what the crowd said. This abundance of miracle witnesses to the pre-eminence of Israel over the Gentile nations, and to the special revelation of Himself which God made to them in His Son. The crowd may have found in it only fuel for narrow national pride and contempt; but it was the divine method for the founding of the kingdom none the less; and these two scenes, set thus side by side, teach the same truth, that the King of men is first the King of Israel.

LESSON XXIX.

The Divine Christ Confessed, the Suffering Christ Denied.

MATTHEW xvi. 13-28.

13. When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

14. And they said, Some say that Thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

15. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?

16. And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

17. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven.

18. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

19. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

20. Then charged He His disciples that they should tell no man that He was Jesus the Christ.

21. From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

22. Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee.

23. But He turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an offence unto Me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

24. Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

25. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it.

26. For what is a man pro-

fited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

27. For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He

shall reward every man according to his works.

28. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom.

THIS lesson is embarrassing from its fulness of material. We can but lightly touch points on which volumes might be, and indeed have been, written.

I. The first section (vv. 13-20) gives us Peter's great confession in the name of the disciples, and Christ's great answer to it. The centre of this section is the eager avowal of the impetuous apostle, always foremost for good or evil. We note the preparation for it, its contents, and its results. As to the preparation,—our Lord is entering on a new era in His work, and desires to bring clearly into His followers' consciousness the sum of His past self-revelation. The excitement, which He had checked after the first miraculous feeding, had died down. The fickle crowd had gone away from Him, and the shadows of the Cross were darkening. Amid the seclusion of the woods, fountains, and rocks of Cæsarea, far away from distracting influences, He puts these two momentous questions. Following the Revised Version reading, we have a double contrast between the first and second. "Men" answers to "ye," and "the Son of man" to "I." The first question is as to the partial and conflicting opinions among the multitudes who had heard His name for Himself from His own lips; the second, in its use of the "I," hints at the fuller unveiling of the depths of His gracious personality, which the disciples had experienced, and implies, "Surely you,

who have been beside Me, and known Me so closely, have reached a deeper understanding." It has a tone of the same wistfulness and wonder as that other question of His, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me?" For their sakes, He seeks to draw out their partly unconscious faith, that had been smouldering, fed by their daily experience of His beauty and tenderness. Half-recognised convictions float in many a heart, which needs but a pointed question to crystallise into master-truths, to which, henceforward, the whole being is subject. Great are the dangers of articulate creeds; but great is the power of putting our shadowy beliefs into plain words. "With the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

Why should this great question have been preceded by the other? Probably to make the disciples feel more distinctly the chaotic contradictions of the popular judgment, and their own isolation by their possession of the clearer light. He wishes them to see the gulf opening between them and their fellows, and so to bind them more closely to Himself. It is the question the answer to which settles everything for a man. It has an intensely sharp point. We cannot take refuge from it in the general opinion. Nor does any other man's judgment about Him matter one whit to us. This Christ has a strange power, after eighteen hundred years, of coming to each of us, with the same persistent interrogation on His lips. And to-day, as then, all depends on the answer which we give. Many answer by exalted estimates of Him, like these varying replies, which ascribed to Him prophetic authority; but they have not understood His own name for Himself, nor drunk in the

meaning of His self-revelation, unless they can reply with the full-toned confession of the apostle, which sets Him far above and apart from the highest and holiest.

As to the contents of the confession, it includes both the human and the divine sides of Christ's nature. He is the Messiah, but He is more than a Jew meant by that name ; He is "the Son of the living God," by which we cannot indeed suppose that Peter meant all that he afterwards learned it contained, or all that the Church has now been taught of its meaning, but which, nevertheless, is not to be watered down as if it did not declare His unique filial relation to the Father, and so His divine nature. Nathanael had burst into rapturous adoration of Jesus as "the Son of God" at the very beginning ; and the glad confidence, which cast out the fear of the dim form striding across the sea, had echoed the confession. All had heard His words, "No man knoweth the Father but the Son" ; and we need not hesitate to interpret this confession as in essence and germ containing the whole future doctrine of our Lord's divinity. True, the speaker did not know all which lay in his words. Do we ? Do we not see here an illustration of the method of Christian progress in doctrine, which consists not in the winning of new truths, but in the penetrating further into the meaning of old and initial truths ? The conviction which made and makes a Christian, is this of Peter's ; and Christian growth is into, not away from it.

As to the results, they are set forth in our Lord's answer, which breathes of delight, and we may almost say gratitude. His manhood knew the thrill of satisfaction at having some hearts which understood, though

partially, and loved even better than they knew. The solemn address to the apostle by his ancestral name gives emphasis to the contrast between his natural weakness and his divine illumination and consequent privilege. The name of Peter is not here bestowed, but interpreted. Christ does not say "Thou shalt be," but "Thou art"; and so presupposes the former conferring of the name. Unquestionably, the apostle is the rock on which the Church is built. The efforts to avoid that conclusion would never have been heard of, but for the Roman Catholic controversy; but they are as unnecessary as unsuccessful. Is it credible that in the course of an address, which is wholly occupied with conferring prerogatives on the apostle, a clause should come in which is concerned about an altogether different subject from the "Thou" of the preceding and the "Thee" of the following clauses, and which yet should take the very name of the apostle, slightly modified, for that other subject? We do not interpret other books in that fashion. But it was not the "flesh and blood" Peter, but Peter as the recipient and faithful utterer of the divine inspiration in his confession, who received these privileges. Therefore they are not his exclusive property, but belong to his faith, which grasped and confessed the divine-human Lord; and wherever that faith is, there are these gifts, which are its results. They are the "natural" consequences of the true faith in Christ in that higher region where the supernatural is the natural. Peter's grasp of Christ's nature wrought upon his character, as pressure does upon sand, and solidified his shifting impetuosity into rocklike firmness. So the same faith will tend to do in any man. It made him the chief

instrument in the establishment of the early Church. On souls steadied and made solid by like faith, and only on such, can Christ build His Church. Of course, the metaphor here regards Jesus, not as the foundation, as the Scripture generally does, but as the Founder. The names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are on the foundations of the heavenly city ; and, in historical fact, the name of this apostle is graven on the deepest and first laid. In like subordinate sense, all who share that heroic faith, and proclaim it, are used by the Master-builder in the foundations of His Church ; and Peter himself is eager to share His name among his brethren, when he says, “Ye also, as living stones.” Built on men who hold by that confession, the Church is immortal ; and the armies who pour out of the gates of the pale kingdoms of the unseen world shall not be able to destroy it. Peter, as confessor of his Lord’s human-divine nature, wields the keys of the kingdom of heaven like a steward of a great house ; and that too was fulfilled in his apostolic activity in his admitting Jews at Pentecost, and Gentiles in the house of Cornelius. But the same power attends all who share his faith and avowal, for the preaching of that faith is the opening of heaven’s door to men. He receives the power of binding and loosing, by which is not meant that of forgiving or retaining sins, but that of prohibiting or allowing actions, or, in other words, of laying down the law of Christian conduct. This meaning of the metaphors is made certain by the common Jewish use of them. Despotic legislative power is not here committed to the apostle, but the great principle is taught that the morality of Christianity flows directly from its theology,

and that whosoever, like Peter, grasps firmly the cardinal truth of Christ's nature, and all which flows therefrom, will have his insight so cleared that his judgments on what is permitted or forbidden to a Christian man will correspond with the decisions of heaven, in the measure of his hold upon the truth which underlies all religion and all morality, namely, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." These are gifts to Peter indeed, but only as possessor of that faith, and are much more truly understood as belonging to all who "possess like precious faith" (as Peter says), than as the prerogative of any individual or class.

II. The second section (vv. 21-23) contains the startling new revelation of the suffering Messiah, and the scholars' repugnance to it. The Gospel has two parts: Jesus is the Christ, and the Christ must suffer and enter His glory. Our Lord has made sure that the disciples have learned the first before He leads to the second. The very conviction of His dignity and divine nature made that second truth the more bewildering; but still the only road to it was through the first. Verse 21 covers an indefinite time, during which Jesus gradually taught His sufferings. Ordinarily we exaggerate the suddenness, and therefore the depth, of Peter's fall, by supposing that it took place immediately after his confession; but the narrative discountenances the idea, and merely says that Jesus then "began" His new teaching. There had been veiled hints of it (such as John ii. 19, and Matt. ix. 15; xii. 40), but henceforward it assumed prominence, and was taught without veil. It was no new thought to Himself, forced on Him by the growing enmity of the nation. The cross always cast its shadow

on His path. He was no enthusiast, beginning with the dream of winning a world to His side, and slowly and heroically making up His mind to die a martyr ; but His purpose in being born was to minister, and to die a ransom for the many. We have nothing to do with a growing consciousness, but simply with an increasing clearness of utterance. Note the detailed accuracy of the provision, which points to Jerusalem as the scene, and to the rulers of the nation as the instruments, and to death as the climax, and to resurrection as the issue, of His sufferings ; the clear setting forth of the divine necessity which, as it ruled all His life, ruled here also, and is expressed in that solemn "must," and the perfectly willing acceptance by Him of that necessity, implied in that "go," and certified by many another word of His. The necessity was no external compulsion, driving Him to an unwelcome sacrifice, but one imposed alike by filial obedience and by brotherly love. He must die because He would save.

How vividly the scene of Peter's rash rejection of the lesson is described ! The apostle, full of eager love, still, as of old, swift to speak, and driven by unexamined impulse, lays his hand on Christ, and draws Him a little apart, while he "begins" to pour out words which show that he has forgotten his confession. "Rebuke" must not be softened down into anything less vehement or more respectful. He knows better than Jesus what will happen. Perhaps his assurance that "this shall never be" means "We will fight first." But he is not allowed to finish what he began ; for the Master, whom he loved unwisely, but well, turns His back on him, as in horror, and shows how deeply moved He is by the

terrible severity of His rebuke. He repels the hint in almost the same words as He had used to the tempter in the wilderness, of whom that Peter, who had so lately been the recipient and proclaimor of a divine illumination, has become the mouth-piece. So possible is it to fall from sunny heights to doleful depths ! So little can any divine inspiration be permanent, if the man turn away from it to think man's thoughts, and set his affections on the things which men desire ! So certainly does minding these degrade to becoming an organ of Satan ! The words are full of restrained emotion, which reveal how real a temptation Peter had flung in Christ's path. The rock has become a stone of stumbling ; the Man Jesus shrank from the cross with a natural and innocent shrinking, which never made His will tremulous, but was none the less real ; and such words from loving lips did affect Him. Let us note, on the whole, that the complete truth about Jesus Christ must include these two parts,—His divine nature and Messiahship, and His death on the cross ; and that neither alone is the gospel, nor is he a disciple, such as Christ desires, who does not cleave to both with mind and heart.

III. In verse 24 to end, the law, which ruled the Master's life, is extended to the servants. They recoiled from the thought of His having to suffer. They had to learn that they too must, if they would be His. First, the condition of discipleship is set before them as being the fellowship of His suffering. "If any man will" gives them the option of withdrawal. A new epoch is beginning, and they will have to enlist again, and do with open eyes. He will have no unwilling soldiers, nor any who have been beguiled into the ranks. No

doubt, some went away, and walked no more with Him. The terms of service are clear. Discipleship means imitation, and imitation means self-crucifixion. At that time they would only partially understand what taking up their cross was, but they would apprehend that a martyred Master must needs have for followers men ready to be martyrs too. But the requirement goes much deeper than this. There is no discipleship without self-denial, both in the easier form of starving passions and desires, and in the harder of yielding up the will, and letting His will supplant ours. Only so can we ever come after Him, and of such sacrifice of self the cross is the eminent example. We cannot think too much of it as the instrument of our reconciliation and forgiveness, but we may, and too often do, think too little of it, as the pattern of our lives. When Jesus began to teach His death, He immediately presented it as His servant's example. Let us not forget the fact.

The ground of the law is next stated in verse 25. The wish to save life is the loss of life in the highest sense. If that desire guide us, then farewell to enthusiasm, courage, the martyr spirit, and all which makes man's life nobler than a beast's. He who is ruled mainly by the wish to keep a whole skin, loses the best part of what he is so anxious to keep. In a wider application, regard for self as a ruling motive is destruction, and selfishness is suicide. On the other hand, lives hazarded for Christ are therein truly saved, and if they be not only hazarded, but actually lost, such loss is gain ; and the same law, by which the Master "must" die and rise again, will work in the servant. Verse 26 urges the wisdom of such apparent folly, and enforces the requirement by the plain

consideration that "life" is worth more than anything beside, and that on the two grounds, that the world itself would be of no use to a dead man, and that, once lost, "life" cannot be brought back. Therefore the dictate of the wisest prudence is that seemingly prodigal flinging away of the lower "life" which puts us in possession of the higher. Note that the appeal is here made to a reasonable regard to personal advantage, and that in the very act of urging to crucify self. So little did Christ think, as some people do, that the desire to save one's soul is selfishness.

Verse 27 confirms all the preceding by the solemn announcement of the coming of the Son of man as Judge. Mark the dignity of the words. He is to come "in the glory of the Father." That ineffable and inaccessible light which rays forth from the Father enwraps the Son. Their glory is one. The waiting angels are "His." He renders to every man according to his doing (his actions considered as one whole). Thus He claims for Himself universal sway, and the power of accurately determining the whole moral character of every life, as well as that of awarding precisely graduated retribution. They surely shall then find their lives who have followed Him here.

Verse 28 adds, with His solemn "verily," a confirmation of this announcement of His coming to judge. The question of what event is referred to may best be answered by noting that it must be one sufficiently far off from the moment of speaking to allow of the death of the greater number of His hearers, and sufficiently near to allow of the survival of some; that it must also be an event, after which these survivors would go the common road into the grave; that it is apparently

distinguished from His coming “in the glory of the Father,” and yet is of such a nature as to afford convincing proof of the establishment of His kingdom on earth, and to be, in some sort, a sign of that final act of judgment. All these requirements (and they are all the fair inferences from the words) meet only in the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the national life of the chosen people. That was a crash of which we faintly realise the tremendous significance. It swept away the last remnant of the hope that Israel was to be the kingdom of the Messiah ; and from out of the dust and chaos of that fall the Christian Church emerged, manifestly destined for world-wide extension. It was a “great and terrible day of the Lord,” and, as such, was a precursor and a prophecy of the day of the Lord, when He “shall come in the glory of the Father,” and “render unto every man according to His deeds.”

LESSON XXX.

“The King in His Beauty.”

MATTHEW xvii. 1-13.

1. And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart.

2. And was transfigured before them: and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light.

3. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with Him.

4. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

5. While He yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him.

6. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.

7. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.

8. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.

9. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.

10. And His disciples asked Him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?

11. And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.

12. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.

13. Then the disciples understood that He spake unto them of John the Baptist.

THE early guess at Tabor as the scene of the transfiguration must be given up as untenable. Some one of the many peaks of Hermon rising right over

Cæsarea is a far more likely place. But the silence of all the accounts as to the locality surely teaches us the unimportance of knowledge on the point. The dangers would more than outweigh the advantages. A similar indefiniteness attaches to the *when*. Are we to think of night or of day? Perhaps the former is slightly the more probable, from the fact of the descent being made "the next day" (Luke). Our conception of the scene will be very different, as we think of that lustre from His face, and that bright cloud, as outshining the blaze of a Syrian sun, or as filling the night with glory. But we cannot settle which view is correct.

There are three distinct parts in the whole incident: the transfiguration proper; the appearance of Moses and Elijah; and the cloud with the voice from it.

I. The transfiguration proper, the general statement that Jesus "was transfigured before them," is immediately followed out into explanatory details. It was twofold: the radiance of His face, and the gleaming whiteness of His raiment, which shone "like the snow" on Hermon, smitten by the sunshine. Probably we are to think of the whole body as giving forth the same mysterious light, which made itself visible, even through the white robe He wore. This would give beautiful accuracy and appropriateness to the distinction drawn in the two metaphors,—that His face was "as the sun," in which the undiluted glory was seen; and His garments as the light, which is sunshine diffused and weakened. There is no hint of any external source of the brightness. It does not seem to have been a reflection from the visible symbol of the divine presence, as was the fading radiance on the face of Moses. That symbol does not

come into view till the last stage of the incident. We are then to think of it as arising from within, not cast from without. We cannot tell whether it was voluntary or involuntary. Luke gives a pregnant hint, in connecting it with Christ's praying, as if the calm ecstasy of communion with the Father brought to the surface the hidden glory of the Son. Can it be that such glory always accompanied His prayers, and that its presence may have been one reason for the sedulous privacy of these, except on this one occasion, when he desired that His faithful three should be "eye-witnesses of His majesty"? However that may be, we have probably to regard the transfiguration as the transient making visible, in the natural, symbolic form of light, of the indwelling divine glory, which dwelt in Him as in a shrine, and here shines through the veil of His flesh. John explains the event, though his words go far beyond it when he says, "We beheld His glory—glory as of the only begotten from the Father."

What was the purpose of the transfiguration? Matthew seems to tell us in that "before them." It was for their sakes, not for His, as indeed follows from the belief that it was the irradiation from within of the indwelling light. The new epoch of His life, in which they were to have a share of trial and cross-bearing, needed some great encouragement poured into their tremulous hearts; and so, for once, He deigned to let them look on His face, shining as the sun, for a remembrance when they saw it covered with "shame and spitting," and His brow bleeding from the thorns. But perhaps we may venture a step farther, and see here some prophecy of that body of His glory in which He now reigns. Speculations as

to the difference between the earthly body of our Lord and ours are fascinating, but unsubstantial. It was a true human body, susceptible of hunger, pain, weariness ; but we are not taught that it carried in it the necessity of death. It may have been more pliable to the spirit's behests, and more transparent to its light, than ours. There may have been in that hour of radiance some approximation to the perfect harmony between the perfect spirit and the body, which is its fit organ, which we know is His now, and to which we also know that He will conform the body of our humiliation. Then His face "shone as the sun" ; when one of these three saw Him in His glory, "His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength," and His own promise to us is that we too "shall shine forth as the sun." Then His garments were white as the light. His promise is that they who are worthy shall "walk with Him in white." The transfiguration was a revelation and a prophecy.

II. The appearance of Moses and Elijah. While the three are gazing with dazzled eyes, suddenly, as if shaped out of air, there stand by Jesus two mighty forms, evidently men, and yet, according to Luke, encompassed in the white radiance, walking with the Son of man in a better furnace. What a stound of awe and wonder must have touched the gazers as the conviction who these were filled their minds, and they recognised, we know not how, the mighty lineaments of the lawgiver and the prophet ! Did the three mortals understand the meaning of the words of the heavenly three ? We cannot tell. Nor does our lesson lead us to dwell upon the theme of that wondrous colloquy. These two might have asked, "Why hast thou disquieted us to bring us up ?" What

is the answer? Wherefore were they there? To tell Jesus that He was to die? No, for that lay plain before Him. To learn from Him the mystery of His passion, that they might be His heralds, the one in Paradise, the other in the pale kingdoms of Hades? Perhaps, but more likely, they came to minister to Him strength for His conflict, even as women did of their substance, and an angel did in Gethsemane. Perhaps the strength came from seeing how they yearned for the fulfilment of the typified redemption; perhaps it came from His being able to speak to them as He could not to any on earth. At all events, surely Moses and Elijah were not brought there for their own sakes alone, nor for the sake of the witnesses, but also for His sake who was prepared by that converse for His cross.

Further, their appearance set forth Christ's death, which was their theme, as the climax of revelation. The law with its requirement and its sacrifices, prophecy with its forward-looking face, stand there, in their representatives, and bear witness that their converging lines meet in Jesus. The finger that wrote the law, and the finger that smote and parted Jordan, are each lifted to point to Him. The stern voices that spoke the commandments, and that hurled threatenings at the unworthy occupants of David's throne, both proclaim "Behold the Lamb of God, the perfect Filler of law, the true King of Israel!" Their presence and their speech was the acknowledgment that this was He whom they had seen from afar; their disappearance proclaims that their work is done when they have pointed to Him. Their presence also teaches us that Jesus is the life of all the living dead. Of course, care must be exercised in drawing

dogmatic conclusions from a manifestly abnormal incident, but some plain truths do result from it. Of these two, one had died, though mystery hung round his death and burial; the other had passed into the heavens by another gate than that of death; and here they both stand with lives undiminished by their mysterious changes, in fullness of power and of consciousness, bathed in glory which was congruous with them now. They are witnesses of an immortal life, and proofs that His yet unpierced hands held the keys of life and death. He opened the gate which moves backwards to no hand but His, and summoned them; and they come, with no napkins about their heads, and no trailing grave-clothes entangling their feet, and own Him as the King of life. They speak, too, of the eager onward gaze which the Old Testament believers turned to the coming Deliverer. In silent anticipation, through all these centuries, good men had lain down to die, saying, "I wait for Thy salvation," and after death their spirits had lived expectant, and crying, like the souls under the altar, "How long, O Lord, how long?" Now these two are brought from their hopeful repose, perchance to learn how near their deliverance was; and behind them we seem to discern a dim crowd of holy men and women, who had died in faith, not having received the promises, and who throng the portals of the unseen world, waiting for the near advent of the better Samson to bear away the gates to the city on the hill, and lead thither their ransomed train.

Peter's bewildered words need not long detain us. He is half dazed, but, true to his rash nature, thinks that he must say something, and that to do something

will relieve the tension of his spirit. His proposal, ridiculous as it is, shows that he had not really understood what he saw. It also expresses his feeling that it is much better to be there than to be travelling to a cross,— and so may stand as an instance of a very real temptation for us all, of neglecting unwelcome duties, and shrinking from rough work, on the plea of holding sweet communion on the mountain. It was not “good” to stay there, and leave demoniacs uncured in the plain.

III. The cloud and the witnessing voice. Peter’s words receive no answer, for, while he is speaking, another solemn and silencing wonder has place. Suddenly a strange cloud forms in the cloudless sky. It is “bright” with no reflection caught from the sun ; it is borne along by no wind ; slowly it settles down upon them, like a roof, and, bright though it is, casts a strange shadow. According to one reading of Luke’s account, Christ and the two heavenly witnesses pass within its folds, leaving the disciples without ; and that separation seems confirmed by Matthew’s saying that the voice came “out of the cloud.” Our evangelist points to its brightness as singular. It was not merely bright, as if smitten by the sunlight, but its whole substance was luminous. It is almost a contradiction to speak of a cloud of light, and the anomalous expression points to something beyond nature. We cannot but remember the pillar which had a heart of fire, and glowed in the darkness over the sleeping camp, and the cloud which filled the house, and drove the priests from the sanctuary by its brightness. Nor should we forget that at His ascension, Jesus was not lost to sight in’ the blue ; but while He was yet visible in the act of blessing, “a cloud

received Him out of their sight." It is, in fact, the familiar symbol of the divine presence, which had long been absent from the temple, and now reappears. We may note the beauty and felicity of the emblem. It blends light and darkness, so suggesting how the very same "attributes" of God are both; and how His revelation of Himself reveals Him as unrevealable. The manifestation of His power is also the "hiding of His power." The inaccessible light is also thick darkness. The same characteristics of His nature are light and joy to some, and blackness and woe to others.

We may note, too, Christ's passage into the cloud. Moses and Elijah, being purged from mortal weakness, could pass thither. But Jesus, alone of men, could pass in the flesh into that brightness, and be hid in its fiery heart, unshrinking and unconsumed. "Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" This is but the witness to the purity of His nature, and the absence in Him of all fuel for fire. That bright cloud was "His own calm home, His habitation from eternity," and where no man, compassed with flesh and sin, could live, He enters as the Son into the bosom of the Father. Then comes the articulate witness to the Son. The solemnity and force of the attestation is increased, if we conceive of the disciples as outside the cloud, and parted from Jesus. This word is meant for them only, and so is distinguished from the similar voice at the baptism, and has added the imperative "Hear Him." The voice bears witness to the mystery of our Lord's person. It points to the contrast between His two attendants and Him. They are servants, "this is the Son." It sets forth His supernaturally born humanity, and, deeper still,

His true and proper divinity, which John unfolds, in his Gospel, as the deepest meaning of the name. It testifies to the unbroken union of love between the Father and Him, and therein to the absolute perfection of our Lord's character. He is the adequate object of the eternal, divine love. As He has been from the timeless depths of old, He is, in His human life, the object of the ever-unruffled divine complacency, in whom the Father can glass Himself as in a pure mirror. It enjoins obedient listening. God's voice bids us hear Christ's voice. If He is the beloved Son, listening to Him is listening to God. This is the purpose of the whole, so far as we are concerned. We are to hear Him, when He declares God ; when He witnesses of Himself, of His love, His work, His death, His judgeship ; when He invites us to come to Him, and find rest ; when He commands and when He promises. Amid the Babel of this day let us listen to that voice, low and gentle, pleading and soft, authoritative, majestic, and sovereign. It will one day shake "not the earth only, but also the heaven." But, as yet, it calls us with strange sweetness, and the music of love in every tone. Well for us if our hearts answer, "Speak, Lord ; for Thy servant heareth."

Matthew tells us that this voice from the cloud completely unmanned the disciples, who fell on their faces, and lay there, we know not how long, till Jesus came and laid a loving hand on them, bidding them arise, and not fear. So when they staggered to their feet, and looked around, they saw nothing but the gray stones of the hillside and the blue sky. "That dread voice was past," and the silence is broken only by the hum of insects or the twitter of a far-off bird. The strange

guests have gone; the radiance has faded from the Master's face, and all is as it used to be. "They saw no one, save Jesus only." It is the summing up of revelation; all others vanish, He abides. It is the summing up of the world's history. Thickening folds of oblivion wrap the past, and all its mighty names get forgotten; but His figure stands out, solitary against the background of the past, as some great mountain, which is seen long after the lower summits are sunk below the horizon. Let us make this the summing up of our lives. We can venture to take Him for our sole Helper, Pattern, Love, and Aim, because He, in His singleness, is enough for our hearts. There are many fragmentary precious things, but one pearl of great price. Then this may be a prophecy of our deaths. A brief darkness, a passing dread, and then His touch and His voice saying, "Arise, be not afraid." So we shall lift up our eyes, and find earth faded, and its voices fallen dim, and see "no one any more, save Jesus only."

LESSON XXXI.

The Law of Precedence in the Kingdom.

MATTHEW xviii. 1-14.

1. At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

2. And Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them,

3. And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

4. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

5. And whoso shall receive one such little child in My name receiveth Me.

6. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

7. Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!

8. Wherefore if thy hand or

thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.

9. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

10. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven.

11. For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.

12. How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?

13. And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep,

than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. | of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little

14. Even so it is not the will | ones should perish.

MARK tells us that the disciples, as they journeyed, had been squabbling about pre-eminence in the kingdom, and that this conversation was brought on by our Lord's question as to the subject of their dispute. It seems at first sight to argue singular insensibility that the first effect of His reiterated announcement of His sufferings should have been their quarrelling for the lead ; but we can understand it, if we suppose that they regarded the half-understood prophecies of His passion as indicating the commencement of the short conflict which was to end in His Messianic reign. So it was time to be getting ready, and settling precedence. The form of their question, in Matthew, connects it with the miracle of the coin in the fish's mouth, in which there was a very plain assertion of Christ's royal dignity, and a distinguishing honour given to Peter. Probably the "then" of the question means, Since Peter is thus selected, are we to look to him as foremost ? Their conception of the kingdom and of rank in it are frankly and entirely earthly. There are to be graded dignities, and these are to depend on His mere will. Our Lord not only answers the letter of their question, but cuts at the root of the temper which inspired it.

I. He shows the conditions of entrance into and eminence in His kingdom by a living example. There were always children at hand round Him, when He wanted them. Their quick instinct for pure and loving souls drew them to Him ; and this little one was not afraid to be taken by the hand, and to be afterwards

caught up in His arms, and pressed to His heart. One does not wonder that the legend that it was Ignatius the martyr should have been current ; for surely the remembrance of that tender clasping arm and gentle breast would not fade nor be fruitless. The disciples had made very sure that they were to be in the kingdom, and that the only question concerning them was how high up in it they were each to be. Christ's answer is like a dash of cold water to that confidence. It is, in effect, "Greatest in the kingdom ! Make sure that you go in at all, first ; which you will never do, so long as you keep your present ambitious minds." Verse 3 lays down the condition of entrance into the kingdom, from which necessarily follows the condition of supremacy in it. What a child is naturally, and without effort or merit, by reason of age and position, we must become, if we are to pass the narrow portal which admits into the large room. That "becoming" is impossible without a revolution in us. "Be converted" is corrected, in the Revised Version, into "turn," and rightly ; for there is in the word a distinct reference to the temper of the disciples, displayed by their question. As long as they cherished it, they could not even get inside, to say nothing of promotion to dignities. Their very question condemned them as incapable of entrance. So there must be a radical change, not unaccompanied, of course, with repentance, but mainly consisting in the substitution of the child's temper for theirs. What is that temper, thus enjoined ? We are not to see here either the entirely modern and shallow sentimental way of looking at childhood, in which popular writers indulge, nor the doctrine of its innocence. It is not Christ's

teaching, either that children are innocent, or that men enter the kingdom by making themselves so. But the child is, by its very position, lowly and modest, and makes no claims, and lives by instinctive confidence, and does not care about honours, and has all these qualities which in us are virtues, and is not puffed up by possessing them. That is the ideal which is realised more generally in the child than analogous ideals are in mature manhood. Such simplicity, modesty, humility, must be ours. We must be made small ere we can enter that door. And as is the requirement for entrance, so is it for eminence. The child does not humble himself, but is so by nature ; but we must humble ourselves if we would be great. Christ implies that there are degrees in the kingdom. It has a nobility, but of such a kind that there may be many greatest ; for the principle of rank there is lowliness. We rise by sinking. The deeper our consciousness of our own unworthiness and weakness, the more capable are we of receiving the divine gifts, and therefore the more fully shall we receive them. The rivers run in the hollows ; the mountain-tops are dry. God works with broken reeds, and the princes in His realm are beggars taken from the dung-hill. A lowliness which made itself lowly for the sake of eminence would miss its aim, for it is not lowliness. The desire to be foremost must be cast out, in order that it may be fulfilled.

II. The question has been answered and our Lord passes to other thoughts rising out of His answer. Verses 5 and 6 set forth antithetically our duties to His little ones. He is not now speaking of the child who served as a living parable to answer the question, but of men

who have made themselves like the child, as is plain from the emphatic "one such child," and from verse 6 ("which believe on Me"). The subject, then, of these verses, is the blessedness of recognising and welcoming the Christ-like lowly believers, and the fatal effect of the opposite conduct. To "receive one such little child in My name" is just to have a sympathetic appreciation of, and to be ready to welcome to heart and home, those who are lowly in their own and in the world's estimate, but princes of Christ's court and kingdom. Such welcome and furtherance will only be given by one who himself has the same type of character in some degree. He who honours and admires a certain kind of excellence has the roots of it in himself. A possible artist lies in him who thrills at the sight or hearing of fair things painted or sung. Our admiration is the index of our aspiration, and our aspiration is the prophecy of our attainment. So it will be a little one's heart which will welcome the little ones, and a lover of Christ, who receives them in His name. The reception includes all forms of sympathy and aid. "In My name" is equivalent to "for the sake of My revealed character," and refers both to the receiver and to the received. The blessedness of such reception, so far as the receiver is concerned, is not merely that he thereby comes into happy relations with Christ's foremost servants, but that he gets Christ Himself into his heart. If with true appreciation of the beauty of such a child-like disposition, I open my heart or my hand to its possessor, I do thereby enlarge my capacity for my own possession of Christ, who dwells in His child, and who comes with him, where he is welcomed. There is no surer way of securing Him for our

own than the loving reception of His children. Whoso lodges the King's favourites will not be left unvisited by the King. To recognise and reverence the greatest in the kingdom is to be one's self a member of their company, and a sharer in their prerogatives.

On the other hand, the antithesis of "receiving" is "causing to stumble," by which is meant giving occasion for moral fall. That would be done by contests about pre-eminence, by arrogance, by non-recognition. The atmosphere of carnality and selfishness in which the disciples were moving, as their question showed, would stifle the tender life of any lowly believer who found himself in it; and they were not only injuring them, selves, but becoming stumbling-blocks to others by their ambition. How much of the present life of average Christians is condemned on the same ground! It is a good test of our Christian character to ask—would it help or hinder a lowly believer to live beside us? How many professing Christians are really, though unconsciously, doing their utmost to pull down their more Christ-like brethren to their own low level! The worldliness and selfish ambitions of the Church are responsible for the stumbling of many who would else have been of Christ's little ones. But, perhaps, we are rather to think of deliberate and consciously laid stumbling-blocks. Knowingly to try to make a good man fall, or to stain a more than usually pure Christian character, is surely the very height of malice, and pre-supposes such a deadly hatred of goodness and of Christ that no fate can be worse than the possession of such a temper. To be flung into the sea, like a dog, with a stone round his neck, would be better for a man than to live to do such

a thing. The deed itself, apart from any other future retribution, is its own punishment; and our Lord's solemn words not only point to such a future retribution, which is infinitely more terrible than the miserable fate described would be for the body, but to the consequences of the act, as so bad in its blind hatred of the highest type of character, and in its conscious preference of evil, as well as so fatal in its consequences, that it were better to die drowned than to live so.

III. In verses 7-9 the progress of the discourse is arrested. They contain Christ's sorrowing gaze upon a world full of stumbling-blocks, and His exhortation to rigorous measures of self-mutilation to escape from them. It is possible that Matthew here, according to his custom, has grouped cognate sayings, not originally spoken in this connection. If our Lord uttered them now, we must suppose Him pausing, with His compassionate imagination arrested by the doleful vision brought before it by that sad word "offend," and turning for a moment from His more immediate purpose. The interposition of these verses will then be an eloquent witness of His sight of a world's sin, and of the pity mingled with righteous abhorrence, which the spectacle excited in Him. His "woe" is not denunciation, but compassion. He laments the fatal necessity, arising from man's evil, not from God's sovereignty, by which even good becomes the incitement to ill, and what were meant for "sure foundations" become "stones of stumbling." That necessity comes to pass either through others or through ourselves; and the efforts of others to lead us wrong would be fruitless, if there were nothing in us to respond to them. If there is nothing about us to catch fire, the

flames will do no harm. So there is but one sentence regarding the tempters without, on whom the same pitying woe, but with a more audible tone of condemnation, is pronounced—since they are to be both pitied and blamed for their devil's work. But the whole stress of the paragraph is thrown into the warning to cast out all occasions of stumbling from ourselves. Hand, foot, and eye, make a climax, as the eye is dearer, and its plucking out a more painful and disabling sacrifice. There are stringent principles in these vivid words. Lawful things may be occasions of sin. Taste, occupations, the culture of some bodily or mental aptitude, study, art, society, all perfectly innocent in themselves, and perfectly permissible for others who are not hurt by them, may damage our religious character. We may be unable to keep them in bounds, and they may be drawing off our interest and work from Christ's service. If so, there is but one thing to do, put your hand on the block, and take the axe in the other, and strike and spare not. It is of no use to try to regulate and moderate; the time for that may come. But, for the present, safety lies only in entire abstinence. Other people may retain the limb, but you cannot. They must judge for themselves, but their experience is not your guide. If the thing hurts your religious life, off with it. Christ bases His command of self-mutilation, as we have before observed, on the purest principles of self-regard. The plainest common sense says that it is better to live maimed than to die whole. He is a fool who insists on keeping a mortified limb, which kills him. Note, too, the possibility of a man cultured, full-summed in all his powers, yet, for lack of the one thing needful, perishing, like some tree,

rounded, symmetrical, complete, without a branch broken or a leaf withered, which is struck by lightning, and blasted for ever. And, on the other hand, a man may be maimed in many a faculty, and extremely one-sided in his growth, ignorant of much that would have enriched and beautified, but, if he have the root of all perfectness in him, then, though he passes into life maimed, he will not continue so there, but every grace which he abjured for Christ's sake, will be given him, and "then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing."

IV. Verses 10-14 return to the main theme, and set forth the honour and dignity of Christ's little ones. Clearly the application of the designation in these closing verses is exclusively to His lowly followers. The warning not to despise them is needed at all times, and, perhaps, seldom more, even by Christians, than now, when so many causes induce a far too high estimate of the world's great ones, and modest, humble godliness looks as dull and sober as some russet-coated little bird among gorgeous cockatoos and birds of paradise. The world's standard is only too current in the Church ; and it needs a spirit kept in harmony with Christ's mind, and some degree of the child-nature in ourselves, to preserve us from overlooking the delicate hidden beauties and unworldly greatness of His truest disciples.

The exhortation is enforced by two considerations,—a glimpse into heaven, and a parable. Fair interpretation can scarcely deny that Christ here teaches that His children are under angel guardianship. We should neither busy ourselves in curious inferences from His reticent words, nor try to blink their plain meaning, but

rather mark their connection and purpose here. He has been teaching that pre-eminence belongs to the child-like spirit. He here opens a door into the court of the heavenly King, and shows us that, as the little ones are foremost in the kingdom of heaven, so the angels who watch over them are nearest the throne in heaven itself. The representation is moulded on the usages of Eastern courts, and similar language in the Old Testament describes the principal courtiers as "the men who see the King's face continually." So high is the honour in which the little ones are held, that the highest angels are set to guard them, and whatever may be thought of them on earth, the loftiest of creatures are glad to serve and keep them.

Following the Revised Version we omit verse 11. If it were genuine, the connection would be that such despising contradicted the purpose of Christ's mission ; and the "for" would refer back to the injunction, not to the glimpse into heaven which enforced it.

The exhortation is further confirmed by the parable of the ninety and nine, which is found, slightly modified in form and in another connection, in Luke xv. Its point here is to show the importance of the little ones as the objects of the seeking love of God, and as so precious to Him that their recovery rejoices His heart. Of course, if verse 11 be genuine, the shepherd is Christ ; but, if we omit it, the application of the parable in verse 14, as illustrating the loving will of God, becomes more direct. In that case, God is the Owner of the sheep. Christ does not emphasise His own love or share in the work, which was not relevant to His purpose, but, leaving that in shadow, casts all the light on the loving

divine will, which counts the little ones as so precious that, if even one of them wanders, all heaven's powers are sent forth to find and recover it. The reference does not seem to be so much to the one great act by which, in Christ's incarnation and sacrifice, a sinful world has been sought and redeemed, as to the numberless acts by which God, in His providence and grace, restores the souls of those humble ones if ever they go astray. For the connection requires that the wandering sheep here should, when it wanders, be "one of these little ones ;" and the parable is understood to illustrate the truth that, because they belong to that number, the least of them is too precious to God to be allowed to wander and die. They have for their keepers the angels of the presence ; they have God Himself, in His yearning love and manifold methods of restoration, to look for them, if ever they are lost, and to bring them back to the fold. Therefore, "see that ye despise not one of these little ones," each of whom is held by the divine will in the grasp of an individualising love which nothing can loosen.

LESSON XXXII.

Forgiven and Unforgiving.

MATTHEW xviii. 21-35.

21. Then came Peter to Him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him ? till seven times ?

22. Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times : but, Until seventy times seven.

23. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

24. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

25. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

26. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

27. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

28. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence : and he laid

hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

29. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

30. And he would not : but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

31. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

32. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me :

33. Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee ?

34. And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

35. So likewise shall My heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

PETER'S question, which arose out of the instructions in verses 15-17, no doubt seemed to him to pro-

pose an extremely wide limit of forgiveness in “seven times.” The rabbis only required four. He perhaps expected praise, or even a diminution of the number, but he forgot that offences remembered are not forgiven. There is no more insincere speech than the common one, “I can forgive, but I cannot forget.” Whether we read our Lord’s answer as seventy times seven, or as “seventy times and seven,” it equally implies “boundlessly and always.” The two perfect numbers are multiplied together to express completeness. Man’s mercy is to have no limits, just as God’s has none; and because this unlimited forgiveness is the law of the kingdom, “therefore” the parable is told. It has three main stages, which we consider in order.

I. The bankrupt debtor forgiven (vv. 23-27). The series of events in these verses is not meant to represent corresponding facts in the kingdom, but the main purpose is to emphasise the two points of the immense debt and the free remission. We do not need, then, to strain the interpretation to find something in the process of pardon, to answer to such features as the formal audit or the command to sell the debtor and his family. The relation of a sinner to God’s law is not completely represented by that of a debtor to a creditor; nor is the repentance, which does not sue for mercy in vain, fully set forth by the prayer, “Have patience, and I will pay thee all.” The intention is not to teach the evangelical doctrine of the means of forgiveness, but simply to sketch the position of the members of the kingdom as recipients of forgiveness. There need be no surprise, therefore, that no allusion is made to the work of Christ as the medium of forgiveness,—a subject

which did not come within the scope of the parable at all.

The king is, of course, God. If we are to seek any specific meaning for the reckoning, we can only point to the manifold ways in which, by providences, by Scripture, conscience, and by a thousand witnesses, God brings us to know our evil. The view of sin as debt is common in Scripture, and rests upon the fact that all sin is a failure to discharge our obligations to God, and a spending, on ourselves or others, of the riches which we receive from Him in order that we may render them back to Him. Though the figure of debt does not reach to the bottom of the guilt of sin, it brings into prominence the thought that there is a person to whom we are indebted, not merely an impersonal law of duty which we have broken. This man owed talents, not pence ; for there are no small sins, since they are all the misuse of such great benefits. The enormous amount of the debt shows that the debtor must have been a high functionary,—perhaps the governor of a province,—or his defalcations could not have run up into millions of pounds. As a slave, he was his master's property, and yet he could be indebted to him. The anomaly excellently represents man's position as absolutely dependent on and belonging to God, and yet placed in such a position of independence that he can call things his, and use them according to his will, and as honoured by being set in stewardship over so large and rich a province, with charge to bring its revenues faithfully to the royal treasury. Christ does not think that man's sin is trivial. The sum, passing imagination, is yet no exaggeration ; and if we think of the constancy of our acts of sin, and

of the greatness of the alienation which may be expressed by the least of them, we shall begin to understand that “all that debt” is not more than ours amounts to. A sunbeam entering an empty room shows it full of motes in the invisible air. The light of that reckoning, pouring into the purest life, reveals the innumerable spores of sin active in every corner of it. No man knows himself rightly who does not feel that the picture here is himself; and no man has a chance of understanding the gospel who under-estimates the gravity and all-pervasiveness of sin.

The king's first stern command is simply the voice of justice and law. He has a right to get his own back, and whether the sale of the bankrupt's whole effects and family will clear the debt, or no, does not matter. Like all hopeless insolvents, the debtor begs for time, and is sanguine in promising impossibilities. Obviously such a cry for respite, accompanied with the promise to clear all the debt, if only time be allowed, cannot be taken as fully representing the spirit of penitence. It is in keeping with the idea of debt, but not with the reality of sin; and all which we can deduce from it is that the king hears the plea for mercy. The emphatic part of the picture is in the royal answer, which goes far beyond the petition, and is the welling up of the king's own heart. Respite was asked; remission is granted. Not the suppliant's prayer, but the king's compassion, is the reason for the gift surpassing the narrow limits of human hopes. The undeserved exuberance of God's mercy, which shames our small petitions by its overlapping abundance, and delights to surprise with the excess of its answers, and to blot out all debts, is the great lesson of the second part

of this picture, as the unmeasurableness of man's sin is of the first. These two are innumerable. Our sins are "more than the hairs of our heads"; but, as the same psalm tells us, God's thoughts "to us-ward" are "more than can be numbered."

II. The change of the forgiven debtor into an unforgiving creditor (vv. 28-30). The transformation is instantaneous. He dries his tears, gets up from his knees, forgets his agony, and goes out to take his fellow-servant by the throat. If he had cared to stay beside the king, he could not have done it. The picture is painted in few, but most significant, strokes. Notice the brutal truculence of the half-throttling grasp, and of the brusque demand, "If you owe, pay." Notice the smallness of the debt. The parable sets a rule-of-three sum: as is twelve million pounds to seventeen and a half pounds, so are our offences against God to our offences against one another. We can do woefully unkind things to men, but they are all nothing in comparison with what we do to God. Note the *verbatim* repetition of his own words, with the significant omissions of "lord" and "all." He and his debtor are more on a level than he and his creditor were; for though, no doubt, his debtor must have been a very small man, not to be able to raise the trifle owing, still all the king's servants are of the same condition. The amount was so small that "all" would have been ludicrous; the greater, therefore, the king's clemency, and the greater his harshness. But his own words out of another man's mouth sound very feeble to him, and awaken no remembrances of his own agony when he used them five minutes ago. He will have his pound of flesh. He cannot sell his fellow-servant; but

he can put him in jail, and keep him there, and so he does. Suppose that his debtor, instead of crying for mercy, had produced his cross account, and had said, "And you owe me so and so." That is what most men do when taken by the throat in this fashion, and charged with their offences against another. But this one owns his fault, and is really one of those who "turn again, saying, I repent," and therefore ought to receive forgiveness. So much the worse does his answer make the selfish savagery of the creditor.

The purpose of this section is to point out the sad fact that such conduct is possible even in forgiven men, and to drag into light its glaring contradiction to the mercy they have received. The principle is implied that God's forgiving love should be not only the object of our trust, but of our imitation. Our forgiveness is to be the echo and reflection of His. Christ teaches throughout the Gospels that men must first have experienced the divine forgiveness for themselves, before they can, in any true and thorough fashion, mould their lives on it, and be themselves merciful. It precedes and motivates ours. Can it be that it should ever be received, and not influence the receiver's conduct? It might seem impossible; but experience answers the question, sadly but decisively, in the affirmative. So strange are the contradictions in our hearts, and so partial the influence on our lives, even of that blessed gift, that mercy received is often swallowed up, like the rivers that disappear underground. Are all professing or all true penitents meek and unresentful? Are we to say that every man is a hypocrite who rises from his knees, where he has been confessing his sins, and goes to his business,

and there offers a hard face to suppliants, and keeps slights and trespasses well in mind? Many real and imperfect Christians have got the length of looking to the forgiving love of God in Christ as their only hope, but not of looking to it as their imperative example. Their minds are, like ocean-going steamers, built in water-tight compartments, and the gospel which is stored in one has not reached all the rest. There is no real forgivingness without previous experience of God's. There should be no real experience of God's without immediately subsequent imitation of it; but though there should not be, there sometimes is. The forgiven, unforgiving servant, has his successors to-day.

III. The unforgiving creditor becomes again an unforgiven debtor (vv. 31-35). This section has four thoughts: the fellow-servants' sorrowful report, the king's stern rebuke, the punishment, and Christ's application of the whole to His followers. As to the first of these, the king is supposed to be in his palace, and the propriety of the parable requires that he should learn the conduct of the forgiven debtor by being told of it. There need, therefore, be no special significance in this part of the story, while, at the same time, it lends itself easily to the explanation that it points to the distress caused to the true members of the kingdom by such inconsistencies in their fellow-subjects. They are sorry, not only for the misery of the debtor, but for the hard-heartedness of the creditor, and sorry, most of all, that such scandals should deform the aspect of the meek kingdom to which they all alike belong. Their refuge is in pouring out their lamentations over an inconsistent Christendom to their God. This teaches us how we are to think of those whose

conduct discredits their profession,—not with blind, feeble indulgence ; still less with anger,—which is the king's prerogative, not the servants',—but with sorrow, which finds the best soothing for itself and remedy for the evil in telling all to the king.

The rebuke addresses the servant for the first time as "wicked." He had been a debtor, but now he is a criminal. The inference is not that unmercifulness is worse than all the former sins, but simply that, within the lines of the parable, the epithet would not have fitted before. His wickedness is not merely in his harshness, but in his non-imitation of the measure which had been dealt to him. He had not learned to take that "even as" for the rule of his life. He in whom this love awakens no kindred love shows that he has no real possession of it. If his heart had been, at the moment, influenced by the sweet consciousness of the mercy he had received, he could not but have been merciful. Here, then, lies the principle, already referred to, that God's great placability is the pattern for us, and that the true motive, which alone makes men merciful "till seventy times seven," is God's boundless mercy to them. Here is the answer to Peter's question. The bounds are set in "even as." Nothing less free and boundless than that divine charity which "is not provoked, endureth all things," and is never overcome of evil, is great and God-like enough to correspond to a Christian's obligations. Such endless mercy is simple duty. "Shouldest not thou?" is the question for us all.

What a contrast between the two words which describe the king's feeling ! "Being angry" is an intentional antithesis to "being moved with compassion." These

two emotions both have their analogies in the heart of God. They who have experienced and misused His mercy have chiefly to fear His wrath. The outward punishment is the translation into fact of His displeasure, which displeasure is the inevitable result of His beholding ways which are not "even as," but the very opposite of "His ways." Its form is determined by the form of the unforgiving man's treatment of his debtor. In a very awful fashion, the line of God's dealings follows all the bends of the line of the man's. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." He had thrown his brother into prison till he could pay; he shall go thither himself, with the addition of pains, and the certainty that he must rot there before he can raise such a sum. So the remitted sin is tied round his neck again, and sinks him. As Augustine says, "He who does not forgive, shuts with his own hands the gate of divine mercy against himself." His unforgiving temper is so diametrically opposed to the state of grace, that it cannot but change it into wrath and punishment. Surely the plain meaning of these words, unpared down by the supposed necessities of a system, is that it is possible to fall from a condition of forgiveness. The gifts of God are without change of purpose on His part; but it is not He who withdraws them from the unmerciful man, but such a man who unfits himself for receiving them. Of course, there is forgiveness for every sin, and for this sin too; but if truly forgiven, it will be abjured. Of course, the meaning of the parable is not that one such act forfeits the kingdom; but that the tendency of every such act is towards losing the grace bestowed. Forgiveness received is a condition precedent

to Christian exercise of forgiveness to our debtors, and forgiveness to our debtors is a condition of retaining the blessedness of forgiveness received. Many a professing Christian has but little conscious grasp of the blessing of God's love, because he does not make that love his pattern, and hence loses the joy of it as his hope.

Our Lord adds His assurance that His parable declares the principles of God's dealings with us in regard to this matter. He calls Him "My Father," to emphasise His own perfect communion with Him, and consequent right to interpret the principles of His judgment, as well as to hint at His own entire sympathy in the severity which He announces. He insists on the universality of the obligation, as laid on "every one" of the subjects of the kingdom, and on the thoroughness of the forgiveness, which must be no mere verbal, grudging, half-and-half thing, retaining a bitter residue in the heart, but sincere and entire, the outgoing of unmixed love to the offender, which covers and forgets his sins, as God has done ours. It is a high ideal, only to be attained by living very closely and constantly in the sunshine of pardon, and the warmth of God's immeasurable and inexhaustible love.

LESSON XXXIII.

The Requirements of the King.

MATTHEW xix. 16-26.

16. And, behold, one came and said unto Him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life ?

17. And He said unto him, Why callest thou Me good ? there is none good but one, that is, God : but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

18. He saith unto Him, Which ? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness.

19. Honour thy father and thy mother : and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

20. The young man saith unto Him, All these things have I kept from my youth up : what lack I yet ?

21. Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell

that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven : and come and follow Me.

22. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful : for he had great possessions.

23. Then said Jesus unto His disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

24. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

25. When His disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved ?

26. But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible ; but with God all things are possible.

WE have here one of the saddest stories in the Gospels. It is a true soul's tragedy. The young man is in earnest, but his earnestness has not volume and force enough to float him over the bar. He wishes to have some great thing bidden him to do, but

he recoils from the sharp test which Christ imposes. He truly wants the prize, but the cost is too great ; and yet he wishes it so much that he goes away without it in deep sorrow, which perhaps, at another day, ripened into the resolve which was too high for him then. There is a certain severity in our Lord's tone, an absence of recognition of the much good in the young man, and a naked stringency in His demand from him, which sound almost harsh, but which are set in their true light by Mark's note, that Jesus "loved him," and therefore treated him thus. The truest way to draw ingenuous souls is not to flatter, nor to make entrance easy by dropping the standard or hiding the requirements, but to call out all their energy by setting before them the lofty ideal. Easy-going disciples are easily made—and lost. Thorough-going ones are most surely won by calling for entire surrender.

I. We may gather together the earlier part of the conversation, as introductory to the Lord's requirement (vv. 16-20), in which we have the picture of a real though imperfect moral earnestness, and may note how Christ deals with it. Matthew tells us that the questioner was young and rich. Luke adds that he was a ruler,—a synagogue official, that is,—which was unusual for a young man, and indicates that his legal blamelessness was recognised. Mark adds one of his touches, which are not only picturesque, but character-revealing, by the information that he came "running" to Jesus in the way, so eager was he, and fell at His feet, so reverential was he. His first question is singularly compacted of good and error. The fact that he came to Christ for a purely religious purpose, not seeking personal advantage

for himself or for others, like the crowds who followed for loaves and cures, nor laying traps for Him with puzzles which might entangle Him with the authorities, nor asking theological questions for curiosity, but honestly and earnestly wanting to be helped to lay hold of eternal life, is to be put down to his credit. He is right in counting it the highest blessing. Where had he got hold of the thought of "eternal life"? It was miles above the dusty speculations and casuistries of the rabbis. Probably from Christ Himself. He was right in recognising that the conditions of possessing it were moral, but his conception of "good" was surface, and he thought more of doing than of being good, and of the desired life as payment for meritorious actions. In a word, he stood at the point of view of the old dispensation. "This do, and thou shalt live," was his belief; and what he wished was further instruction as to what "this" was. He was to be praised in that he docilely brought his question to Jesus, even though, as Christ's answer shows, there was error mingling in his docility. Such is the character,—a young man, rich, influential, touched with real longings for the highest life, ready, so far as he knows himself, to do whatever he is bidden, in order to secure it. We might have expected Christ, who opened His arms wide for publicans and harlots, to have welcomed this fair, ingenuous seeker with some kindly word. But He has none for him. We adopt the reading of the Authorized Version, in which our Lord's first word is repellent. It is in effect,—"There is no need for your question, which answers itself. There is one good Being, the Source and Type of every good thing, and therefore the good, which you ask about, can only be conformity to

His will. You need not come to me to know what you are to do." He relegates the questioner, not to his own conscience, but to the authoritative revealed will of God in the law. Modern views of Christ's work, which put all its stress on the perfection of His moral character, and His office as a pattern of righteousness, may well be rebuked by the fact that He expressly disclaimed this character, and declared that, if He was only to be regarded as republishing the law of human conduct, His work was needless. Men have enough knowledge of what they must do to enter into life, without Jesus Christ. No doubt Christ's moral teaching transcends that of old ; but His special work was not to tell men what to do, but to make it possible for them to do it ; to give, not the law, but the power, both the motive and the impulse, which will fulfil the law. On another occasion He answered a similar question in a different manner. When the Jews asked Him, " What must we do, that we may work the works of God ?" He replied by the plain evangelical statement, " This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." Why did He not answer the young ruler thus ? Only because He knew that he needed to be led to that thought by having his own self-complacency shattered, and the clinging of his soul to earth laid bare. The whole treatment of him here is meant to bring him to the apprehension of faith as preceding all truly good work.

The young man's second question says a great deal in its one word. It indicates astonishment at being remanded to these old, well-worn precepts, and might be rendered " What sort of commandments ?" as if taking

it for granted that they must be new and peculiar. It is the same spirit which in all ages has led men who, with partial insight, longed after eternal life, to seek it by fantastic and unusual roads of extraordinary sacrifices or services—the spirit which filled monasteries, and invented hair shirts, and fastings, and swinging with hook in your back at Hindoo festivals. The craving for more than ordinary “good works” shows a profound mistake in the estimate of the ordinary, and a fatal blunder as to the relation between “goodness” and “eternal life.”

So Christ answers the question by quoting the second half of the Decalogue, which deals with the homeliest duties, and appending to it the summary of the law, which requires love to our neighbour as to ourselves. Why does He omit the earlier half? Probably because He would meet the error of the question, by presenting only the plainest, most familiar commandments, and because He desired to excite the consciousness of deficiency, which could be most easily done in connection with these.

There is a touch of impatience in the rejoinder, “All these have I kept,” with more than a touch of self-satisfaction. The law has failed to accomplish one of its chief purposes in the young man, in that it has not taught him his sinfulness. No doubt he had a right to say that his outward life had been free from breaches of such very elementary morality, which any old woman could have taught him. He had never gone below the surface of the commandments, nor below the surface of his acts, or he would not have answered so jauntily. He had yet to learn that the height of “goodness” is

reached, not by adding some strange new performances to the threadbare precepts of every-day duty, but by digging deep into them, and bottoming the fabric of our lives on their inmost spirit. He had yet to learn that whoever says, "All these have I kept," thereby convicts himself of understanding neither them nor himself.

Still he was not at rest, although he had, as he fancied, kept them all. His last question is a plaintive, honest acknowledgment of the hungry void within, which no round of outward obediences can ever fill. He knows that he has not the inner fountain springing up into eternal life. He is dimly aware of something wanting, whether in his obedience or no, at all events in his peace ; and he is right in believing that the reason for the conscious void is something wanting in his conduct. But he will not learn what Christ has been trying to teach him, that he needs no new commandment, but a deeper understanding and keeping of the old. Hence his question, half a wail of a hungry heart, half petulant impatience with Christ's reiteration of obvious duties. There are multitudes of his kind in all ages, honestly wishing to lay hold of eternal life, able to point to virtuous conduct, anxious to know and do anything lacking, and yet painfully certain that they have not got hold of the right end of the stick, but that something is wanting somewhere.

II. Now comes the sharp-pointed test, which pricks the brilliant bubble. Mark tells us that Jesus accompanied His word with one of those looks which searched the soul, and bore His love into it. "If thou wouldest be perfect" takes up the confession of something "lack-

ing," and shows what that is. It is unnecessary to remark that this commandment to sell all and give to the poor is intended only for the individual case. No other would-be disciple was called upon to do so. It cannot be meant for others ; for, if all were sellers, where would the buyers be? Nor need we do more than point out that the command of renunciation is only half of Christ's answer, the other being, "Come, follow Me." But we are not to slide easily over the precept with the comfortable thought that it was special treatment for a special case. The principle involved in it is medicine for all, and the only way of healing for any. This man was tied to earth by the cords of his wealth. They did not hinder him from keeping the commandments, for he had no temptations to murder, or adultery, or theft, or neglect of parents. But they did hinder him from giving his whole self up, and from regarding eternal life as the most precious of all things. Therefore for him there was no safety short of entire outward denuding himself of them ; and, if he was in earnest out and out in his questions, here was a new thing for him to do. Others are hindered by other things, and they are called to abandon these. The one thing needful for entrance into life is at bottom the self-surrender, and the casting away of all else for its sovereign sake. "I do count them but dung" must be the language of every one who will win Christ. The hands must be emptied of treasures, and the heart swept clear of lesser loves, if He is to be grasped by our hands, and to dwell in our hearts. More of us than we are willing to believe are kept from entire surrender to Jesus Christ by money and worldly possessions ; and many professing Christians are kept shrivelled

and weak and joyless because they love their wealth more than their Lord, and would think it madness to do as this man was bidden to do. When ballast is thrown out, the balloon shoots up. A general unlading of the "thick clay" which weighs down the Christian life of England and of America, would let thousands soar to heights which they will never reach as long as they love money and what it buys as much as they do. The letter of this commandment may be only applicable in a special case (though, perhaps, this one young man was not the only human being that ever needed this treatment), but the spirit is of universal application. No man enters into life, who does not count all things but loss, and die to them all that he may follow Christ.

III. Then comes the collapse of all the enthusiasm. His earnestness chills at the touch of the test. What has become of the eagerness which brought him running to Jesus, and of the willingness to do any hard task to which he was set? It was real, but shallow. It deceived himself. But Christ's words cut down to the inner man, and lay bare, for his own inspection, the hard core of selfish worldliness which lay beneath. How many radiant enthusiasms, which cheat their subjects quite as much as the beholders, disappear like tinted mist when the hard facts of self-sacrifice strike against them! How much sheer worldliness disguises itself from itself and from others in glistering garments of noble sentiments, which fall at a touch, when real giving up is called for, and show the ugly thing below! How much "religion" goes about the world, and gets made "a ruler" of the synagogue in recognition of its excellence, which needs but this Ithuriel's spear to start up in its own

shape ! The completeness and immediateness of the collapse are noticeable. The young man seems to speak no word, and to take no time for reflection. He stands for a moment as if stunned, and then silently turns away. What a moment ! His fate hung on it. Once more we see the awful mystery enacted before our eyes, of a soul gathering up its power to put away life. Who will say that the decision of a moment, which is the outcome of all the past, may not fix the whole future ? This man had never before been consciously brought to the fork in the road ; but now the two ways are before him, and, knowingly, he chooses the worst. Christ did not desire him to do so ; but He did desire that he should choose, and should know that he did. It was the truest kindness to tear away the veil of surface goodness which hid him from himself, and to force him to a conscious decision.

One sign of grace he does give, in that he went away "sorrowful." He is not angry nor careless. He cannot see the fair prospect of the eternal life, which he had in some real fashion desired, fade away, without a pang. If he goes back to the world, he goes back feeling more acutely than ever that it cannot satisfy him. He loves it too well to give it up, but not enough to feel that it is enough. Surely, in coming days, that godly sorrow would work a change of the foolish choice, and we may hope that he found no rest till he cast away all else to make Christ his own. A soul which has travelled as far on the road to life eternal as this man had done, can scarcely thereafter walk the broad road of selfishness and death with entire satisfaction.

IV. The section closes with Christ's comment on the sad incident. He has no word of condemnation, but

passes at once from the individual to the general lesson, of the difficulty which rich men (or, as He explains it in Mark, men who "trust in riches") have in entering the kingdom. The reflection breathes a tone of pity, and is not so much blame as a merciful recognition of special temptations which affect His judgment, and should modify ours. A camel with its great body, long neck, and hump, struggling to get through a needle's eye, is their emblem. It is a new thing to pity rich men, or to think of their wealth as disqualifying them for anything. The disciples, with childish *naïveté*, wonder. We may wonder that they wondered. They could not understand what sort of a kingdom it was into which capitalists would find entrance difficult. All doors fly open for them to-day, as then. They do not find much difficulty in getting into the Church, however hard it may be to get into the kingdom. But it still remains true that the man who has wealth has a hindrance to his religious character, which, like all hindrances, may be made a help by the use he makes of it; and that the man who trusts in riches, which he who possesses them is woefully likely to do, has made the hindrance into a barrier which he cannot pass.

That is a lesson which commercial nations, like England and America, have need to lay to heart, not as a worn-out saying of the Bible, which means very little for us, but as heavy with significance, and pointing to the special dangers which beset their Christian perfection.

So real is the peril of riches, that Christ would have His disciples regard the victory over it as beyond our human power, and beckons us away from the effort to overcome the love of the world in our own strength,

pointing us to God, in whose mighty grace, breathed into our feeble wills and treacherous hearts, is the only force which can overcome the attraction of perishable riches, and make any of us willing or able to renounce them all that we may win Christ. The young ruler had just shown that "with men this is impossible." Perhaps he still lingered near enough to catch the assurance that the surrender, which had been too much for him to achieve, might yet be joyfully made, since "with God all things are possible."

LESSON XXXIV.

Who Sit Next the King.

MATTHEW XX. 17-29.

17. And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them,

18. Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death,

19. And shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify Him: and the third day He shall rise again.

20. Then came to Him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping Him, and desiring a certain thing of Him.

21. And He said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto Him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on Thy right hand, and the other on the left, in Thy kingdom.

22. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto Him, We are able.

23. And He saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on My right hand, and on My left, is not Mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of My Father.

24. And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.

25. But Jesus called them unto Him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.

26. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;

27. And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:

28. Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.

29. And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed Him.

Jesus was the loneliest Man who ever lived, and never more solitary than when with His disciples who understood so dimly and shared so imperfectly His thoughts and aims. This lesson derives pathos from the sharp contrast between what filled His heart and theirs, as He pressed on before them, and they followed, awed by the fixed resolve and absorbed preoccupation stamped upon His look and gait. He thought of the cross, a week off; they, of miserable personal jealousies and ambitions.

I. Note then, first, the thoughts of Christ, which He vainly tries to make His followers share. Matthew does not tell us, as Mark does, that Jesus went before the wondering group. But perhaps He hints at it in that singular expression, "Jesus was going up to Jerusalem." The roads were full of joyous travellers on their way to the annual feast, among whom there would be many Galilean faces recognised, when the disciples joined the stream of pilgrims from the north, near Jericho. Perhaps the secrecy of our Lord's solemn announcement, made to them "apart," was in part due to the fear lest the inflammable and ignorant enthusiasm of the multitude might be set on fire, and some renewed attempt made to put Him at the centre of an armed rising. At any rate, He gathers His straggling followers round Him, and there, by the wayside, tells them once more what thoughts had surrounded Him with the strange atmosphere, which they had instinctively felt was not for them to breathe. This is the third time, since Peter's confession at Cæsarea Philippi, that Jesus speaks to them of His sufferings. It is in advance of the others in the particularity of the details, the double "delivering

up," or betrayal, the mention of the "Gentiles" as the actual inflictors of death, the preliminaries of mocking and scourging; there is progress in His communications, but not in His knowledge. He did not see only the outlines when farther off, and the details when nearer, but all the particulars were plain before Him from the very first, and so were endured many times before they were endured. Nor have we here the language of probability, as one who, by ordinary calculation, was forecasting the inevitable result of His collision with authority. Knowledge, not expectation, speaks thus. The certainty and minute accuracy are so obviously superhuman that the only resource of some critics is the suggestion that the words are an addition after the event. That is a confession that if Jesus spoke thus, He was more than man. There is no reason for doubting that He did, except the determination that He shall not be acknowledged to be more. The calmness of the announcement is as noteworthy as its minuteness and certainty. No agitation disturbs His soul, nor any reluctance draws Him back. We think much, and rightly, of His gentleness. Let us reverently magnify His strength of resolve, when He "steadfastly set His face to go to" Calvary, and let us remember that it was love for us which impelled Him, with calm, unwavering tenacity of will, along that path. Note, too, the gracious silence as to the betrayer. The priests and scribes, who betray Him to the Romans, are named, but he who is to betray Him to them is not. He stood there among the Twelve, and heard the words, perhaps unconscious as yet of the purpose growing underground in his heart, but surely knowing that he had ceased to love or believe.

Note, further, Christ's purpose in this communication. It was not only to prepare the disciples, but also to lighten His own heart. He would fain have them share what weighed on it, and have even their poor sympathy in the few remaining hours. He would have been less, not more, than man, if He had not stretched out His hand to feel in the darkness for the grasp of friends. And He did so in vain. "I looked for comforters, . . . but I found none,"—not a word of sorrow or sympathy, not a syllable to show that they either heard, or understood, or cared for, the sad announcement. Peter's rash "rebuke" was better than this dumb apathy. It had at least warm love in it. The only excuse is that they were utterly bewildered, and could not take in anything so remote from their notions of Messiah's fate. Thus lonely was Jesus amidst those who loved Him best, and had listened to Him longest.

II. We have, in touching contrast with the self-sacrificing thoughts of Christ, the unsympathising disciples' vulgar ambition, and Christ's patient treatment of it (vv. 20-23). "Then came to Him." All that these two understood of Christ's announcement was that the crisis was near for the establishment of His kingdom, and all which that belief excited in them was, "Then it is high time for us to be looking after our dignities in it." They had been distinguished from the Twelve, and, along with Peter, had been made Christ's special companions, Salome, their mother, was apparently the Virgin's sister, and was certainly one of the women whose "ministering" supplied Christ's wants. Whether she or her sons were at the bottom of her prayer, she was their mouthpiece, as is seen by our Lord's answering them, not her, so

harmonising with Mark's less precise account, which omits Salome altogether. It was, in fact, a family attempt to steal a march on their associate and competitor, Peter. The request is a strangely mingled web of good and bad, but we must confess the bad is most conspicuous. They were eager to be near Him ; they thought honours conferred by Him were the highest blessing ; they believed in His kingdom as just about to be set up. But their ignorance, after all teaching, of the sort of kingdom it was to be, their coarse vulgar ambition, their selfish cunning, their shameless desire to cut in before their friends, their utter indifference to the bearing on Jesus of the announcement just made, are black threads in the web. How blind to everything but its own shabby ends, and how cruelly regardless of appeals to sympathy, earthly ambition makes men ! Contrast these two with their future selves, and consider whether any natural processes would have made such "polished shafts" out of such timber.

How patient and pitying is Christ's answer ! He turns from His own thoughts without a word of reproach, and addresses Himself to drag these two from the mire of selfish ambition. He will not put their request down to a worse cause than ignorance ; and that ignorance, deep and culpable as it is, evokes His compassion rather than His blame. They neither understood what pre-eminence in the kingdom was, nor how it was attained. But He will not frighten them away by the bare truth, curtly affirmed, but draws them to get a glimpse of it for themselves by His question. A share in His kingdom means a share in His sufferings ; are they ready to buy it at that cost ? Now here lies a truth for all time, and for every

believing soul. True, the outward form of Christ's sufferings is only repeated in martyrs, and the inward reality of them can never be repeated, for He drank the whole bitter cup "full of the wrath of almighty God," precisely in order that none of us might ever need to taste a drop of the same. But still, the law for all His servants remains to-day what it has always been,—that we must suffer with Him, if we are to reign with Him. The life of His disciples is the appropriation of His life; and that puts them in a similar relation to the world with His, and necessarily involves analogous experiences and conformity of character. Not only pre-eminence in, but entrance into, His kingdom, requires the "fellowship of His sufferings." He hands the cup to us all, and bids us drink. Blessed be His name! If we make His sufferings ours, He makes ours His. He has tasted them all before us, and has left the fragrance of His lip on the cup's edge, and that sweetens the bitterest draught.

The two loving but selfish followers show to more advantage in their answer to the boding question than in their prayer. "We can" in its brevity (one word in Greek) indicates grave resolve, not taken in utter ignorance. It was the answer of true loving hearts, that knew they were binding themselves to something serious, though they knew not what. And nobly they stood to it in after days. The one, when he died the first martyr of the Twelve; the other, through the long life in which he was appointed to

"Linger out his fellows all,
And die in bloodless age."

They knew themselves to be promising to endure an

unknown lot of sorrow ; and they did not falter for a moment, with their confident, and yet not self-confident, "we can." If we really love Christ, we shall feel that, with His help, we can face anything, so long as it keeps us in touch with Him. We too are called upon to give ourselves up in vows and aspirations which involve more pain than we know when we make them. None can share His throne who will not say "we can," when He asks if we can share His cup.

Then, when they have been already lifted into a region of self-surrender, high above the grovelling earthliness of a moment before, He unveils somewhat of the future, as they are able to bear it, and assures them that they shall not lack the outward conditions which, rightly used, lead to the desired eminence. The words are a promise, not a sad prophecy of evil. James and John are pointed away, as we all are, from future rewards, to present duties, as the sure way to these. As Luther says, "You are anxious to know how you are to come to thrones. They will come of themselves. The seat on which you are to sit in heaven was made long ago. See how you are to get there. You will get there, as I shall. I shall have to suffer. Can you drink of the cup? If we do not go away from our Lord, we shall find sceptre and throne in good time."

So, finally, our Lord corrects in plain words the error that He could give away dignity in His kingdom, as a piece of favouritism, and explains that sitting on His right hand and left depends on something else than His mere will. We cannot take His words as an absolute denial of His right to give heavenly rewards, without contradicting the uniform tenor of Scripture. He is the

Judge. His dying servant rested on the assurance that He would give him the crown of righteousness. John in Patmos heard the sevenfold "I will give to him that overcometh." The easiest explanation of the apparent discrepancy is probably that of adding no supplement in translation, and taking "except" as equivalent to "but," in which case we have not a denial of His giving, but an affirmation of it, with the explanation of the persons to whom it is given. But, if this be thought inadmissible (though Chrysostom, who adopts it, perhaps knew as much Greek as the moderns, who protest against such a translation), the meaning of the disclaimer of power is necessarily settled by the prayer which it answers ; and Christ here is simply saying that He does not give pre-eminence in the fashion in which they thought,—that is, from mere will, irrespective of moral fitness,—nor of His own arbitrary pleasure, but in accordance with that will of the Father which is ever His law. The ground of all men's fate lies in the eternal purpose ; and they for whom these places of honour are prepared, are they who are most worthy of them, and have been prepared for them by deepest participation in His spirit here. It would seem a fair inference that there are degrees of nearness to Christ in the heavenly kingdom, and that we may rightly aspire after these ; only let us remember the conditions, and seek to be near Him here, in true partaking of His death, knowing that "if we endure, we shall also reign with Him." Nor let us forget that in the blessed community of heaven there is no rivalry, nor is one's pre-eminence another's degradation ; and that, if there be loftier thrones for some, in another aspect all sit with Him on "His throne," the apex of the universe.

III. The section ends with a lesson for all as to the meaning of dignity in the kingdom. The ten were tarred with the same stick as the two, else they would not have been so angry. What a picture of the rivalries that raged even in that band this gives ! How possible it was, and is, to know Christ “after the flesh,” and not to have caught one gleam of His likeness ! How often the copy of our sins in others stirs us to indignation ! The previous conversation had been private, but its purport soon leaked out ; and we can fancy the flashing eyes and harsh words, which, however, they were careful to indulge in at some distance from Jesus. He called them to Him. The storm would quiet as they half reluctantly came up to Him. He does not directly rebuke, but calmly unfolds the principles of rule in the kingdom, therein teaching us teachers that it is not always wise to specify the faults we want to mend, and that the best way to get rid of weeds is to sow good seed. The teaching consists of a contrast and of a parallel. Rank in the kingdom is the opposite of rank in the world, and its true nature and purpose are learned by looking at Him. In the world rule means, lording it over inferiors, and, the lower you go, the harsher often is the imperiousness ; for there seems an anti-climax in “rulers” and “great ones,” and a climax in “lord it” and “exercise authority.” The king’s great man is, in these Eastern lands, often more of an oppressor than the king. Christ’s kingdom is the reversal of all this. The disciples had been thinking that it was only another mightier of the same sort, and that dignity in it meant sitting on thrones. They are to learn that it means service, not masterfulness ; work, not repose ; sacrifice,

not indulgence. Not only is service of our fellows for Christ's sake the road to pre-eminence, but it is the task of those who are pre-eminent ; and that, no doubt, for heaven as well as for earth. There seems to be a climax in the statement of the law of the kingdom corresponding to that in the former clause ; for "great" is less than "first," and "minister" implies a less lowly place than "bondsman," which is the true rendering of the second word "servant" here. The world has, to some extent, learned this lesson, and authority now is more aware of its duties than in the bad old days ; but it is a long way yet from having learned it thoroughly, and any approach to having done so is due to the influence of Christianity.

How can we touch the deep words in which Christ sets His own life and death before us as a pattern in the fag-end of this brief chapter? Enough to say that here we have His own plain statement of what He thought the purpose of His life. How crowded with instruction in the deepest truths it is. The name by which He calls Himself ; the pre-existence and voluntary entrance into human conditions implied in that significant "came ;" the broad distinction between the merciful ministering of His life and the mysterious ransom of His death ; the language which can only mean that that death is the price paid for our liberty, and purchases us for His own ; the emphasis of that "instead of," which only receives its full meaning when His death is heartily accepted as substitutionary ; the wide sweep of the purpose of it as "instead of many," which contrasts the one offering with the great multitude which no man can number, who are actually redeemed to God thereby ;

and does not hinder that the “many” should, in so far as the purpose and scope of His death are concerned, be the “all.” These are the truths which shine like a great constellation of closely packed stars in these great words. Let us not forget the purpose for which they were spoken, namely, to insist that that holy life and death of uttermost self-sacrifice is the pattern for all His followers. If we trust in His death, we are to imitate His sacrifice. The cross was His throne. What else should His servants’ be?

LESSON XXXV.

The Coming of the King to His Palace.

MATTHEW xxi. 1-16.

1. And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,

2. Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto Me.

3. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.

4. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying,

5. Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

6. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them,

7. And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set Him thereon.

8. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches

from the trees, and strawed them in the way.

9. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

10. And when He was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?

11. And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

12. And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves,

13. And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.

14. And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple; and He healed them.

15. And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the

Son of David; they were sore displeased,

16. And said unto Him,
Hearest Thou what these say?

And Jesus saith unto them,
Yea; have ye never read, Out of
the mouth of babes and sucklings
Thou hast perfected praise?

Jesus spent His last Sabbath in the quiet home at Bethany with Lazarus and His sisters. Some sense of His approaching death tinged the modest festivities of that evening with sadness, and spoke in Mary's "anointing of His body for the burying." The pause was brief, and, with the dawn of Sunday, He set Himself again to tread the road to the cross. Who can doubt that He felt the relief of that momentary relaxation of the strain on His spirit, and the corresponding pressure of its renewed tightening? This lesson shows Him putting out from the quiet haven, and facing the storm again. It is in two main sections, dealing respectively with the royal procession, and the acts of the King in the temple.

I. The procession of the King. The first noteworthy point is that our Lord initiates the whole, and deliberately sets Himself to evoke the popular enthusiasm by a distinct, voluntary fulfilment of a Messianic prophecy. The allusion to the prophecy, in His sending for the colt and mounting it, may have escaped the disciples and the crowds of pilgrims; but they rightly caught His intention to make a solemn triumphal entry into the city, and responded with a burst of enthusiasm, which He expected and wished. The poor garments flung hastily on the animals, the travel-stained cloaks cast on the rocky path, the branches of olive and palm waved in the hands, and the tumult of acclaim, which shrilly echoed the words of the psalm, and proclaimed Him the Son of David, are all tokens that the crowds hailed Him as their King, and were all permitted and welcomed

by Him. All this is in absolute opposition to His usual action, which had been one long effort to damp down inflammable and unspiritual Messianic hopes, and to avoid the very enthusiasm which now surges round Him unchecked. Certainly that calm figure, sitting on the¹ slow-pacing ass, with the noisy multitude pressing round Him, is strangely unlike Him, who hid Himself among the hills when they sought to make Him a King. His action is the more remarkable, if it be remembered that the roads were alive with pilgrims, most of whom passing through Bethany would be Galileans, that they had seen Lazarus walking about the village, and knew who had raised him ; that the Passover festival was the time of all the year when popular tumults were to be expected ; and that the crowds going to Jerusalem were met by a crowd coming from it, bent on seeing the doer and the subject of the great miracle. Into this heap of combustibles our Lord puts a light. He must have meant that it should blaze as it did. What is the reason for this contrast ? The need for the former reticence no longer existed. There was no fear now of His teaching and ministry being interrupted by popular outburst. He knew that it was finished, and that His hour had come. Therefore, the same motive of filial obedience which had led Him to avoid what would prevent His finishing His Father's commission, now impelled Him to draw the attention of the nation and its rulers to the full extent of His claims, and to put the plain issue of acceptance or rejection in the most unmistakable manner. A certain divine decorum, if we may so call it, required that once He should enter the city as its King. Some among the shouting crowds might have their enthusiasm

purified and spiritualised, if once it were directed to Him. It was for us, no less than for them, that this one interruption of His ordinary method was adopted by Him, that we too might ponder the fact that He laid His hand on that magnificent prophecy, and said, "It is Mine. I am the King."

The royal procession is also a revelation of the character of the King and the nature of His kingdom. A strange King this, indeed, who has not even an ass of His own, and, for followers, peasants with palm branches instead of swords! What would a Roman soldier or one of Herod's men have thought of that rustic procession of a pauper Prince on an ass, and a hundred or two of weaponless, penniless men? Christ's one moment of royal pomp is as eloquent of His humiliation as the long stretch of His lowly life is. And yet, as is always the case, side by side with the lowliness there gleams the veiled splendour. He had to borrow the colt, and the message in which He asks for it is a strange paradox. "The Lord hath need of him." So great was the poverty of so great a King. But it spoke, too, of a more than human knowledge, and of an authority which had only to require in order to receive. Some farming villager, no doubt, who was a disciple, but secretly, gladly yielded his beasts. The prophecy which Matthew quotes, with the omission of some words, from Zechariah, and the addition of the first clause from Isaiah, is symbolic, and would have been amply fulfilled in the mission and character of Christ, though this event had never taken place. But just as it is symbolic, so this external fulfilment, which is intended to point to the real fulfilment, is also symbolic. The chariot and the

horse are the emblems of conquerors. It is fitting that the Prince of Peace should make His state entry on a colt, unridden before, and saddled only with a garment. Zechariah meant that Zion's King should not reign by the right of the strongest, and that all His triumphs should be won by lowly meekness. Christ meant the same by His literal fulfilment. And has not the picture of Him, throned thus, stamped for ever on the imagination of the world a profounder sense of the inmost nature of His kingdom than many words would have done? Have we learned the lesson of the gentleness which belongs to His kingdom, and of the unchristian character of war and violence? Do we understand what the Psalmist meant when he sang, "In Thy majesty ride on prosperously, because of . . . meekness"? Let us not forget the other picture, "Behold, a white horse, and He that sat thereon, called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He doth judge and make war."

The entry may remind us also of the worthlessness of mere enthusiastic feeling in reference to Jesus Christ. This was the Sunday. How many of that crowd were shouting as loudly, "Crucify Him!" "Not this Man; but Barabbas," on the Friday? The palm-branches had not faded, where they had been tossed, before the fickle crowd had swung round to the opposite mood. Perhaps the very exuberance of feeling at the beginning had something to do with the bitterness of the execrations at the end of the week. He had not answered their expectations, but, instead of heading a revolt, had simply taught in the temple, and meekly let Himself be laid hold of. Nothing succeeds like success, and nobody is so quickly forsaken as the idol of a popular rising. All

are eager to disclaim connection with Him, and to efface the remembrance of their Sunday's hosannas by their groans round His gibbet. But there is a wider lesson here. No enthusiasm can be too intense which is based upon a true sense of our need of Christ, and of His work for us ; but it is easy to excite apparently religious emotion by partial presentations of Him, and such excitement foams itself away by its very violence, like some Eastern river that in winter time dashes down the wady with irresistible force, and in summer is bone dry. Unless we know Christ to be the Saviour of our souls and the Lamb of God, we shall soon tire of singing hosannas in His train, and want a king with more pretensions ; but if we have learned who and what He is to us, then let us open our mouths wide, and not be afraid of letting the world hear our shout of praise.

II. The coming of the King in the temple. The discussion of the accuracy of Matthew's arrangement of events here does not fall to me. He has evidently grouped, as usual, incidents which have a common bearing, and wishes to put these three of the cleansing, the healing, and the pleasure in the children's praise, as the characteristic acts of the King in the temple. We can scarcely avoid seeing in the first of the three a reference to Malachi's prophecy, "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple. . . . And He shall purify the sons of Levi." His first act, when in manhood He visited the temple, had been to cleanse. His first act when He enters it as its Lord is the same. The abuse had grown again apace. Much could be said in its vindication, as convenient and harmless, and it was too profitable to be lightly abandoned. But the

altar of Mammon so near the altar of God was sacrilege in His eyes, and though He had passed the traders unmolested many times since that first driving out, now that He solemnly comes to claim His rights, He cannot but repeat it. It is perhaps significant that His words now have both a more sovereign and a more severe tone than before. Then He had spoken of "My Father's house;" now it is "My house," which are a part of His quotation indeed, but not therefore necessarily void of reference to Himself. He is exercising the authority of a Son over His own house, and bears Himself as Lord of the temple. Before, He charged them with making it a "house of merchandise;" now, with turning it into a robbers' cave. Evil rebuked and done again is worse than before. Trafficking in things pertaining to the altar is even more likely than other trading to cross the not always very well defined line which separates trade from trickery and commerce from theft. That lesson needs to be laid to heart on both sides of the Atlantic. There is always a fringe of moneyed interests round Christ's Church, seeking gain out of religious institutions; and their stands have a wonderful tendency to creep inwards from the court of the Gentiles to holier places. The parasite grows very quickly, and Christ has to come more than once to keep down its growth. The sellers of doves and changers of money into the sacred shekel were venial offenders compared with many in the Church, and the race is not extinct. If Christ were to come to His house to-day, in bodily form, who doubts that He would begin, as He did before, by driving the traders out of His temple? How many "most respectable" usages and people would have to go, if He did!

The second characteristic, or we might say symbolical, act is the healing of the blind and lame. Royal state and cleansing severity are wonderfully blended with tender pity and the gentle hand of sovereign virtue to heal. The very manifestation of the former drew the needy to Him ; and the blind, though they could not see, and the lame, though they could not walk, managed to grope and hobble their way to Him, not afraid of His severity, nor daunted by His royalty. No doubt they haunted the temple precincts as beggars, with perhaps as little sense of its sacredness as the money-changers ; but their misery kindled a flicker of confidence and desire, to which He who tends the dimmest wick till it breaks into clear flame could not but respond. If, in His house, He casts out the mercenary, He will heal the cripples and the blind, who know their need, and faintly trust His heart and power. Such a trait could not be wanting in this typical representation of the acts of the King.

Finally, He encourages and casts the shield of His approval round the children's praises. How natural it is that the children, pleased with the stir, and not yet drilled into conventionalism, should have kept up the glad shouts, even inside the temple enclosure ! How their fresh treble voices ring yet through all these centuries ! The priests had, no doubt, been nursing their wrath at all that had been going on, but they had not dared to interfere with the cleansing, nor, for very shame, with the healings ; but now they see their opportunity. This is a clear breach of all propriety, and that is the crime of crimes in the eyes of such people. They had kept quite cool and serenely contemptuous

in the stir of the glad procession, and they did not much care though He healed some beggars ; but to have this unseemly noise, though it was praise, was more than they could stand. Ecclesiastical martinets, and men whose religion is mostly ceremony, are, of course, more "moved with indignation" at any breach of ceremonial regulations than at holes made in graver laws. Nothing makes men more insensitive to the ring of real worship than being accustomed to the dull decorum of formal worship. Christ answers their "hearest Thou" with a "did ye never read," and shuts their mouths with words so apposite in their plainest meaning that even they are silenced. To Him these young ringing hosannas are "perfect praise," and worth any quantity of rabbi's preachments. In their deeper sense, His words declare that the ear of God and of His Son, the Lord of the temple, is more gladly filled with the praises of the "little ones," who know their weakness, and hymn His goodness with simple tongue, than with heartless eloquence of words or pomp of worship. The psalm from which the words are taken declares man's superiority over the highest works of God's hands, and the perfecting of the divine praise from his lips. We are but as the little children of creation, but because we know sin and redemption, we lead the chorus of heaven. As St. Bernard says, "Something is wanting to the praise of heaven, if those be wanting who can say, "We went through fire and through water ; and Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place." In like manner, those praise Him most acceptably among men who know their feebleness, and with stammering lips humbly try to breathe their love, their need, and their trust.

LESSON XXXVI.

The Vineyard and its Keepers.

MATTHEW xxi. 33-46.

33. Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country:

34. And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.

35. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.

36. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise.

37. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.

38. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.

39. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.

40. When the lord therefore

of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?

41. They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.

42. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?

43. Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

44. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

45. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard His parables, they perceived that He spake of them.

46. But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitude, because they took Him for a prophet.

THIS parable was apparently spoken on the Tuesday of the Passion week. It was a day of hand-to-hand conflict with the Jewish authorities and of exhausting toil, as the bare enumeration of its incidents shows. It included all that Matthew records between verse 20 of this chapter and the end of the twenty-fifth chapter,—the answer to the deputation from the Sanhedrin ; the three parables occasioned by it, namely, those of the two sons, this one, and that of the marriage of the king's son ; the three answers to the traps of the Pharisees and Herodians about the tribute, of the Sadducees about the resurrection, and of the ruler about the chief commandment ; His question to His questioners about the Son and Lord of David ; the stern woes hurled at the unmasked hypocrites ; to which must be added, from other Gospels, the sweet eulogium on the widow's mite, and the deep saying to the Greeks about the corn of wheat, with, possibly, the incident of the woman taken in adultery ; and then, after such a day, the solemn prophecies of the end contained in Matthew xxiv. and xxv., spoken on the way to Bethany, as the evening shadows were falling. What a day ! What a fountain of wisdom and love which poured out all this ! The pungent severity of this parable, with its transparent veil of narrative, is only appreciated by keeping clearly in view the circumstances and the listeners. They had struck at Him with their question of His authority, and He parries the blow. Now it is His turn, and the sharp point goes home.

I. The first stage is the preparation of the vineyard, in which three steps are marked. It is planted and furnished with all appliances needful for making wine,

which is its great end. The direct divine origin of the religious ideas and observances of "Judaism" is thus asserted by Christ. The only explanation of them is that God enclosed that bit of the wilderness, and with His own hands set growing there these exotics. Neither the theology nor the ritual is of man's establishing. We need not seek for special meanings for wall, wine-press, and tower. They simply express the completeness of the equipment of the vineyard, as in Isaiah's song, which lies at the foundation of the parable, and suggest his question, "What could have been done more?"

Thus furnished, the vineyard is next handed over to the husbandmen, who, in Matthew, are exclusively the rulers, while in Luke they are the people. No doubt it was "like people, like priest." The strange dominion of the Pharisees rested entirely on popular consent, and their temper accurately indexed that of the nation. The Sanhedrin was the chief object at which Christ aimed the parable. But they only gave form and voice to the national spirit, and "the people loved to have it so." National responsibilities are not to be slipped out of by being shifted on to the broad shoulders of governments or influential men. Who lets them be governments and influential?

"Guv'ment ain't to answer for it,
God will send the bill to you."

Christ teaches both rulers and ruled, then, here, the ground and purpose of their privileges. They prided themselves on these as their own, but they were only tenants. They made the "boast of the law"; but they forgot that fruit was the end of the divine planting and

equipment. Holiness and glad obedience was what God sought, and when He found them, He was refreshed as with "grapes in the wilderness."

Having installed the husbandmen, the owner goes into another country. The cluster of miracles which inaugurate an epoch of revelation are not continued beyond the beginning. Centuries of comparative divine silence followed the planting of the vineyard. Having given us our charge, God, as it were, steps aside to leave us room to work as we will, and so to display what we are made of. He is absent in so far as conspicuous oversight and retribution are concerned. He is present to help, love, and bless. The faithful husbandman has Him always near, a joy and a strength, else no fruit would grow; but the sin and misery of the unfaithful are that he thinks of Him as far off.

II. Then comes the habitual ill-treatment of the messengers. These are, of course, the prophets, whose office was not only to foretell, but to plead for obedience and trust, the fruits sought by God. The whole history of the nation is summed up in this dark picture. Generation after generation of princes, priests, and people, had done the same thing. There is no more remarkable historical fact than that of the uniform hostility of the Jews to the prophets. That a nation of such a sort as always to hate, and generally to murder, them should have had them in long succession, throughout its history, is surely inexplicable on any naturalistic hypothesis. Such men were not the natural product of the race, nor of its circumstances, as their fate shows. How did they spring up? No "philosophy of Jewish history" explains the anomaly except the one stated here,—"he sent his

servants." We are told nowadays that the Jews had a natural genius for religion, just as the Greeks for art and thought, and the Romans for law and order, and that that explains the origin of the prophets. Does it explain their treatment?

The hostility of the husbandmen grows with indulgence. From beating they go on to killing, and stoning is a specially savage form of killing. The opposition which began, as the former parable tells us, with polite hypocrisy and lip obedience, changed, under the stimulus of prophetic appeals, to honest refusal, and from that to violence which did not hesitate to slay. The more God pleads with men, the more self-conscious and bitter becomes their hatred ; and the more bitter their hatred, the more does He plead, sending other messengers more, perhaps, in number, or possibly of more weight, with larger commission and clearer light. Thus the antagonistic forces both grow, and the worse men become, the louder and more beseeching the call of God to them. That is always true ; and it is also ever true that he, who begins with "I go, sir," and goes not, is in a fair way to end with stoning the prophets.

Christ treats the whole long series of violent rejections as the acts of the same set of husbandmen. The class, or nation was one, as the stream is one, though all its particles were different ; and the Pharisees and scribes, who stood with frowning hatred before Him as He spoke, were the living embodiment of the spirit which had animated all the past. In so far as they inherited the taint, and repeated the conduct, the guilt of all the former generations was laid at their door. They declared themselves their predecessors' heirs ; and as they reproduced

their actions, they would have to bear the accumulated weight of the consequences.

III. Verses 37-39 tell of the mission of the son and of its fatal issue. Three things are prominent in them. The first is the unique position which Christ here claims, with unwonted openness and decisiveness, as apart from and far above all the prophets. They constitute one order, but He stands alone, sustaining a closer relation to God. They were faithful "as servants," but He "as a Son," or, as Mark has it, the only and beloved Son. The listeners understood Him well enough. The assertion, which seemed audacious blasphemy to them, fitted on with all His acts in that last week, which was not only the crisis of His life, but of the nation's fate. Rulers and people must decide whether they will own or reject their king, and they must do it with their eyes open. Jesus claimed to fill a unique position. Was He right or wrong in His claim? If He was wrong, what becomes of His wisdom, His meekness, His religion? Is a religious teacher, who made the mistake of thinking that He was the Son of God, in a sense in which no other man is, worthy of admiration? If He was right, what becomes of a christianity which sees in Him only the foremost of the prophets?

The next point marked is the owner's vain hope in sending his son. He thought that he would be welcomed, and he was disappointed. It was his last attempt. Christ knew Himself to be God's last appeal, as He is to all men, as well as to that generation. He is the last arrow in God's quiver. When He has shot that bolt, the resources even of Divine love are exhausted, and no more can be done for the vineyard than

He has done for it. We need not wonder at unfulfilled hopes being here ascribed to God. His thought is only putting into language the great mystery which besets all His pleadings with men, which are carried on, though they often fail, and which must, therefore, in view of His foreknowledge, be regarded as carried on with the knowledge that they will fail. That is the long-suffering patience of God. The difficulty here is common to the words of the parable and to the facts of God's unwearied pleading with impenitent men. Its surface is a difficulty, its heart is an abyss of all-hoping charity.

The last point is the vain calculation of the husbandmen. Christ puts hidden motives into plain words, and reveals to these rulers what they scarcely knew of their own hearts. Did they, in their secret conclaves, look each other in the face, and confess that He was the heir? Did He not Himself ground His prayer for their pardon on their ignorance? But their ignorance was not entire, else they had had no sin; neither was their knowledge complete, else they had had no pardon. Beneath many an obstinate denial of Him lies a secret confession, or misgiving, which is more truly the man than the loud negation. And such strange contradictions are men, that the secret conviction is often the very thing which gives bitterness and eagerness to the hostility. So it was with some of those whose hidden suspicions are here set in the light. How was the rulers' or the people's wish to "seize on His inheritance" their motive for killing Jesus? Their great sin was their desire to have their national prerogatives, and render no true obedience. The ruling class clung to their privileges, and forgot their responsibilities, while

the people were proud of their standing as Jews, and careless of God's service. Neither wanted to be reminded of their debt to the Lord of the vineyard, and their hostility to Jesus was mainly because He would call on them for the fruits. If they could get this unwelcome and persistent voice silenced, they could go on in the comfortable old fashion of lip-service and real selfishness. It is an account, in vividly parabolic language, not only of their hostility, but of that of many men who are against Him. They want to possess life and its good, without being forever pestered with reminders of the terms on which they hold it, and of God's desire for their love and obedience. They have a secret feeling that Christ has the right to ask for their hearts, and so they often turn from Him angrily, and sometimes hate.

With what sad calmness does Jesus tell the fate of the son, so certain that it is already as good as done ! It was done in their counsels, and yet He does not cease to plead, if perchance some hearts may be touched, and withdraw themselves from the confederacy of murder.

IV. We have next the self-condemnation from unwilling lips. Our Lord turns to the rulers with startling and dramatic suddenness, which may have thrown them off their guard, so that their answer leaped out before they had time to think whom it hit. His solemn earnestness laid a spell on them, which drew their own condemnation from them, though they had penetrated the thin veil of the parable, and knew full well who the husbandmen were. Nor could they refuse to answer a question about legal punishments for dishonesty, put to them, the fountains of law, without incurring a second time the humiliation just inflicted when He had forced them to

acknowledge that they, the fountains of knowledge, did not know where John came from. So, from all these motives, and, perhaps, from a mingling of audacity, which would brazen it out, and pretend not to see the bearing of the question, they answer. Like Caiaphas in his counsel, and Pilate with his writing on the cross, and many another, they spoke deeper things than they knew, and confessed beforehand how just the judgments were, which followed the very lines marked out by their own words.

V. Then comes the solemn application and naked truth of the parable. We have no space to dwell on the cycle of prophecies concerning the corner-stone, nor on the original application of the psalm. We must be content with remarking that our Lord, in this last portion of His address, throws away even the thin veil of parable, and speaks the sternest truth in the nakedest words. He puts His own claim in the plainest fashion, as the corner-stone on which the true kingdom of God was to be built. He brands the men who stood before him as incompetent builders, who did not know the stone needed for their edifice when they saw it. He declares, with triumphant confidence, the futility of opposition to Himself,—even though it kill Him. He is sure that God will build on Him, and that His place in the building, which shall rise through the ages, will be, to even careless eyes, the crown of the manifest wonders of God's hand. Strange words from a man who knew that in three days He would be crucified! Stranger still, they have come true! He is the foundation of the best part of the best men; the basis of thought, the motive for action, the pattern of life, the ground of hope, for

countless individuals ; and on Him stands firm the society of His Church, and is hung all the glory of His Father's house.

Christ confirms the sentence just spoken by the rulers on themselves, but with the inversion of its clauses. All disguise is at an end. The fatal "you" is pronounced. The husbandmen's calculation had been that killing the heir would make them lords of the vineyard ; the grim fact was that they cast themselves out when they cast Him out. He is the heir. If we want the inheritance, we must get it through Him, and not kill or reject, but trust and obey Him. The sentence declares the two truths; that possession of the vineyard depends on honouring the son, and on bringing forth the fruits. The kingdom has been taken from the churches of Asia Minor, Africa, and Syria, because they bore no fruit. It is not held by us on other conditions. Who can venture to speak of the awful doom set forth in the last words here ? It has two stages : one a lesser misery, which is the lot of him who stumbles against the stone, while it lies passive, to be built on ; one more dreadful, when it has acquired motion and comes down with irresistible impetus. To stumble at Christ, or to refuse His grace, and not to base our lives and hopes on Him, is maiming and damage, in many ways, here and now. But suppose the stone endowed with motion, what can stand against it ? And suppose that the Christ, who is now offered for the rock on which we may pile our hopes and never be confounded, comes to judge, will He not crush the mightiest opponent as the dust of the summer threshing-floor ?

LESSON XXXVII.

Two Ways of Despising God's Feast.

MATTHEW xxii. 1-14.

1. And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said,

2. The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,

3. And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.

4. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.

5. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise:

6. And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.

7. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

THIS parable and the dressers make a pair. in time, as well as subject.

8. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.

9. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.

10. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.

11. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment:

12. And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.

13. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

14. For many are called, but few are chosen.

former one of the vine-dressers make a pair. They are closely connected “Jesus answered.” What?

Obviously, the unspoken murderous hate, restrained by fear, which had been raised in the rulers' minds, and flashed in their eyes, and moved in their gestures. Christ answers it by repeating His blow; for the present parable is, in outline, identical with the preceding, though differing in colouring, and carrying its thoughts farther. That stopped with the transference of the kingdom to the Gentiles; this passes on to speak also of the development among the Gentiles, and ends with the law "many called, few chosen," which is exemplified in Jew and Gentile. There are, then, two parts in it: verses 1-9 covering the same ground as the former; verses 10-14 adding new matter.

I. The judgment on those who refuse the offered joys of the kingdom. In the previous parable the kingdom was presented on the side of duty and service. The call was to render obedience. The vineyard was a sphere for toil. The owner had given it indeed, but, having given, he required. That is only half the truth, and the least joyful half. So this parable dismisses all ideas of work, duty, service, requirement, and instead gives the emblem of a marriage feast as the picture of the kingdom. It therein unites two familiar prophetic images for the messianic times,—those of a festival and of a marriage. As Luther says, "He calls it a marriage feast, not a time of toil or a time of sorrow, but a time of holiday and a time of joy; in which we make ourselves fine, sing, play, dance, eat, drink, are glad, and have a good time; else it would not be a wedding feast if people were to be working, mourning, or crying. Therefore, Christ calls His Christianity and gospel by the name of the highest joy on earth; namely, by the

name of a marriage feast." How pathetic this designation of His kingdom is on Christ's lips, when we remember how near His bitter agony He stood, and tasted its bitterness already ! It is not the whole truth any more than the vineyard emblem. Both must be united in our idea of the kingdom, as both may be in experience. It is possible to be at once toiling among the vines in the hot sunshine, and feasting at the table. The Christian life is not all grinding at heavy tasks, nor all enjoyments of spiritual refreshment ; but the work may be so done as to be our meat—as it was His,—and the glad repose may be unbroken even in the midst of toil. We are, at one and the same time, labourers in the King's vineyard, and guests at the King's table ; and the same duality will, in some unknown fashion, continue in the perfect kingdom, where there will be both work and feasting, and all the life shall be both in one.

The second point to be noticed is the invitations of the king. There had been an invitation before the point at which the parable begins, for the servants are sent to summon those who had already been "called." That calling, which lies beyond the horizon of our parable, is the whole series of agencies in Old Testament times. So this parable begins almost where the former leaves off. They only slightly overlap. The first servants here are Christ Himself and His followers in their ministry during His life ; and the second set are the apostles and preachers of the gospel during the period between the completion of the preparation of the feast (that is, the death of Christ) and the destruction of Jerusalem. The characteristic difference of their message from that of the servants in the former parable

embodies the whole difference between the preaching of the prophets, as messengers demanding the fruit of righteousness, and the glad tidings of a gospel of free grace which does not demand, but offers, and does not say "obey" until it has said "eat, and be glad." The reiterated invitations not only correspond to the actual facts, but, like the facts, set the miracle of God's patience in a still brighter light than the former story did; for while it is wonderful that the lord of the vineyard should stoop to ask so often for fruit, it is far more wonderful that the founder of the feast, who is king too, should stoop to offer over and over again the refused abundance of his table. Mark, further, the refusal of the invitations: "They would not (or "did not wish to") come." That is Christ's gentle way of describing the unbelief of His generation. It is the second set of refusers who are painted in darker colours. We are accustomed to think that the sin of His contemporaries was great beyond parallel, but He seems here to hint that the sin of those who reject Him after the cross and the resurrection is blacker than theirs. At any rate, it clearly is so. But note that the parable speaks as if the refusers were the same persons throughout, thus taking the same point of view as the former one did, and regarding the generations of the Jews as one whole. There is a real unity, though the individuals be different, if the spirit actuating successive generations be the same.

Note the two classes of rejecters. The first simply pay no attention, because their heads are full of business. They do not even speak more or less lame excuses, as the refusers in Luke's similar parable had decency to do. The king's messenger addresses a group, who pause on

their road for a moment to listen listlessly to what He has to say, and, when he has done, disperse without a word, each man going on his road as if nothing had happened. The ground of their indifference lies in their absorption with this world's good, and their belief that it is best. "His own farm," as the original puts it emphatically, holds one man by the solid delights of possessing acres that he can walk over and till; his merchandise draws another, by the excitement of speculation, and the lust of acquiring. It is not only the hurry and fever of a great commercial city, but the quiet and leisure of country life, which shuts out care for God's feast. Strange preference of toil and risk of loss to abundance, repose, and joy! Savages barter gold for glass beads. We choose lives of weary work and hunting after uncertain riches, rather than listen to his call, despising the open-handed housekeeping of our Father's house, and trying to fill our hunger with the swine's husks. The suicidal madness of refusing the kingdom is set in a vivid light in these quiet words.

But stranger still is the conduct of the rest. Why should they kill men whose only fault was bringing them a hospitable invitation? The incongruity of the representation has given offence to some interpreters, who are not slow to point out how Christ could have improved His parable. But the reality is more incongruous still, and the unmotived outburst of wrath against the innocent bearers of a kindly invitation is only too true to life. Mark the distinction drawn by our Lord between the bulk of the people who simply neglected, and the few who violently opposed. He does not charge the guilt on all. The murderers of Him and of His first followers

were not the mass of the nation, who, left to themselves, would not have done it, but the few who stirred up the many. But, though He does not lay the guilt at the doors of all, yet the punishment falls on all, and, when the city is burned, the houses of the negligent and of the slayers are equally consumed ; for simple refusal of the message and slaying the messengers were but the positive and superlative degrees of the same thing : rebellion against the king, whose invitation was a command.

The fatal issue is presented, as in the former parable, in two parts : the destruction of the rebels, and the passing over of the kingdom to others. But the differences are noteworthy. Here we read that "the king was wroth." The insult to a king is worse than the dishonesty to a landlord. The refusal of God's proffered grace is even more certain to awake that awful reality, the wrath of God, than the failure to render the fruits of the good possessed. Love repelled and thrown back on itself cannot but become wrath. That refusal, which is rebellion, is fittingly described as punished by force of arms and the burning of the city. We can scarcely help seeing that our Lord here, in a very striking and unusual way, mingles prose prediction with parabolic imagery. Some commentators object to this, and take the armies and the burning to be only part of the imagery, but it is difficult to believe that. Note the forcible pronouns, "His armies," and "their city." The terrible Roman legions were His soldiers, for the time being, the axe which He laid to the root of the tree ; the city had ceased to be His, just as the temple ceased to be "My house," and became, by their sin, "your house." The

legend told that, before their destruction, a mighty voice was heard saying, "Let us depart," and, with the sound of rushing wings, His presence left sanctuary and city. When He was no longer "the glory in the midst," He was no longer "a wall of fire round about," and the Roman torches worked their will on the city which was no longer "the city of our God."

The command to gather in others to fill the vacant places follows on the destruction of the city. This may seem to be opposed to the facts of the transference of the kingdom to the Gentiles, which certainly was begun long before Jerusalem fell. But its fall was the final and complete severance of Christianity from Judaism, and not till then had the messengers to give up the summons to Israel as hopeless. Perhaps Paul had this parable floating in his memory when he said to the howling blasphemers at Antioch in Pisidia, "Seeing ye . . . judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us." "They which were bidden were not worthy," and their unworthiness consisted not in any other moral demerit, but solely in this, that they had refused the proffered blessings. That is the only thing which makes any of us unworthy. And that will make the best of us unworthy.

II. Verses 10-14 carry us beyond the preceding parable, and show us the judgment of the unworthy acceptors of the invitation. There are two ways of sinning against God's merciful gift: the one is refusing to accept it; the other is taking it in outward seeming, but continuing in sin. The former was the sin of the Jews; the latter is the sin of nominal Christians. We may briefly note the

points of this appendix to the parable. The first is the indiscriminate invitation, which is more emphatically marked as being so, by the mention of the "bad" before the good among the guests. God's offer is for all, and, in a very real sense, is specially sent to the worst, just as the doctor goes first to the most severely wounded. So the motley crew, without the least attempt at discrimination, are seated at the table. If the Church understands its business, it will have nothing to do in its message with distinctions of character any more than of class, but, if it makes any difference, will give the outcast and disreputable the first place in its efforts. Is that what it does?

The next point is the king's inspection. The word rendered "behold" implies a fixed and minute observation. When does that scrutiny take place? Obviously, from the sequel, the final judgment is referred to, and it is remarkable that here there is no mention of the king's son as a judge. No parable can shadow forth all truth, and though the Father has committed all judgment to the Son, the Son's judgment is the Father's, and the exigencies of the parable required that the son as bridegroom should not be brought into view as judge. Note that there is one man only without the dress needed. That may be an instance of the lenity of Christ's charity, which hopeth all things; or it may rather be intended to suggest the keenness of the king's glance, which, in all the crowded tables, picks out the one ragged losel who had found his way there,—so individual is His knowledge, so impossible for us to hide in the crowd. Mark that the feast has not begun, though the guests are seated.

The judgment stands at the threshold of the heavenly kingdom. The king speaks with a certain coldness, very unlike the welcome fit for a guest; and his question is one of astonishment at the rude boldness of the man who came there, knowing that he had not the proper dress. (That knowledge is implied in the form of the sentence in the Greek.) What, then, is the wedding garment? It can be nothing else than righteousness, moral purity, which fits for sitting at His table in His kingdom. And the man who has it not is the nominal Christian, who says that he has accepted God's invitation, and lives in sin, not putting off the old man with his deeds, nor putting on the new man, which is created in righteousness. How that garment was to be obtained is no part of this parable. We know that it is only to be received by faith in Jesus Christ, and that if we are to pass the scrutiny of the King, it must be "not having our own righteousness," but His made ours by faith which makes us righteous, and then by all holy effort, and toil in His strength, we must clothe our souls in the dress which befits the banqueting hall; for only they who are washed and clothed in fine linen, clean and white, shall sit there. But Christ's purpose here was not to explain how the robe was to be procured, but to insist that it must be worn.

"He was speechless,"—or, as the word means, muzzled." The man is self-condemned, and, having nothing to say in extenuation, the solemn promise is pronounced, of ejection from the lighted hall, with limbs bound, so that he cannot struggle, and consignment to the blackness outside, of which our Lord adds, in words not put into the king's mouth, but which we have heard

from Him before, "there shall be the [well known and terrible] weeping and gnashing of teeth,"—awful though figurative expressions for despair and passion.

Both parts of the parable come under one law, and exemplify one principle of the kingdom, that its invitations extend more widely than the real possession of its gifts. The unbelieving Jew, in one direction, and the unrighteous Christian in another, are instances.

That wide and well-worn question of the ground of God's choice does not enter into the scope of the parable. For it, the choice is proved by the actual participation in the feast. They who do not choose to receive the invitation, or to put on the wedding garment, do, in different ways, show that they are not "chosen," though "called." The lesson is, not interminable and insoluble questionings about God's secrets, but earnest heed to His gracious call, and earnest, believing effort to make the fair garment our very own, "if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked."

LESSON XXXVIII.

The King's Farewell.

MATTHEW xxiii. 27-39.

27. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye are like unto whitened sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

28. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

29. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,

30. And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

31. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.

32. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.

33. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell ?

34. Wherefore, behold, I send

unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes : and some of them ye shall kill and crucify ; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city :

35. That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

36. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

37. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not !

38. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

39. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.

IF, with the majority of authorities, we exclude verse 14 from the text, there are, in this chapter, seven woes, like seven thunders launched against the rulers.

They are scathing exposures, but, as the very word implies, full of sorrow as well as severity. They are not denunciations, but prophecies, warning that the end of such tempers must be mournful. The wailing of an infinite compassion, rather than the accents of anger, sounds in them ; and it alone is heard in the outburst of lamenting in which Christ's heart runs over, as in a passion of tears, at the close. The blending of sternness and pity, each perfect, is the characteristic of this wonderful close of our Lord's appeals to His nation. Could such tones of love and righteous anger joined have been sent echoing through the ages in this Gospel if they had not been heard ?

I. The woe of the whitened sepulchres. The first four woes are directed mainly to the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees ; the last three to their characters. The two first of these fasten on the same sin of hypocritical holiness. There is, however, a difference between the representation of hypocrites under the metaphor of the clean outside of the cup and platter, and that of the whitened sepulchre. In the former, the hidden sin is "extortion and excess" ; that is, sensual enjoyment wrongly procured, of which the emblems of cup and plate suggest that good eating and drinking are a chief part. In the latter, it is "iniquity,"—a more general and darker name for sin. In the former, the Pharisee is "blind," self-deceived in part or altogether ; in the latter, stress is rather laid on His "appearance unto men." The repetition of the same charge in the two woes teaches us Christ's estimate of the gravity and frequency of the sin.

The whitened tombs of Mohammedan saints still

gleam in the strong sunlight on many a knoll in Palestine. If the talmudical practice is as old as our Lord's time, the annual whitewashing was lately over. Its purpose was not to adorn the tombs, but to make them conspicuous, so that they might be avoided for fear of defilement. So He would say, with terrible irony, that the apparent holiness of the rulers was really a sign of corruption, and a warning to keep away from them. What a blow at their self-complacency ! And how profoundly true it is that the more punctiliously white the hypocrite's outside, the more foul is he within, and the wider a berth will all discerning people give him ! The terrible force of the figure needs no dwelling on. In Christ's estimate, such a soul was the very dwelling-place of death ; and foul odours and worms and corruption filled its sickening recesses. Terrible words to come from His lips into which grace was poured, and bold words to be flashed at listeners who held the life of the speaker in their hands ! There are two sorts of hypocrites, the conscious and the unconscious ; and there are ten of the latter for one of the former, and each ten times more dangerous. Established religion breeds them, and they are specially likely to be found among those whose business is to study the documents in which it is embodied. These woes are not like thunder-peals rolling above our heads, while the lightning strikes the earth miles away. A religion which is mostly whitewash is as common among us as ever it was in Jerusalem ; and its foul accompaniments of corruption becoming more rotten every year, as the whitewash is laid on thicker, may be smelt among us, and its fatal end is as sure.

II. The woe of the sepulchre builders (vv. 29-36).

In these verses we have, first, the specification of another form of hypocrisy, consisting in building the prophets' tombs, and disavowing the fathers' murder of them. Honouring dead prophets was right ; but honouring dead ones and killing living ones was conscious or unconscious hypocrisy. The temper of mind which leads to glorifying the past witnesses, also leads to supposing that all truth was given by them ; and hence that the living teachers, who carry their message farther, are false prophets. A generation which was ready to kill Jesus in honour of Moses, would have killed Moses in honour of Abraham, and would not have had the faintest apprehension of the message of either.

It is a great deal easier to build tombs than to accept teachings, and a good deal of the posthumous honour paid to God's messengers means, " It's a good thing they are dead, and that we have nothing to do but to put up a monument." Bi-centenaries and ter-centenaries and jubilees do not always imply either the understanding or the acceptance of the principles supposed to be glorified thereby. But the magnifiers of the past are often quite unconscious of the hollowness of their admiration, and honest in their horror of their fathers' acts ; and we all need the probe of such words as Christ's to pierce the skin of our lazy reverence for our fathers' prophets, and let out the foul matter below, namely, our own blindness to God's messengers of to-day.

The statement of the hypocrisy is followed, in verses 31-33, with its unmasking and condemnation. The words glow with righteous wrath at white heat, and end in a burst of indignation, most unfamiliar to His lips. Three sentences, like triple lightning, flash from His pained

heart. With almost scornful subtlety He lays hold of their imagined words, to convict them of kindred with those whose deeds they would disown. "Our fathers, say you? Then you do belong to the same family, after all. You confess that you have their blood in your veins; and, in the very act of denying sympathy with their conduct, you own kindred. And, for all your protestations, spiritual kindred goes with bodily descent." Christ here recognises that children probably "take after their parents," or, in modern scientific slang, that "heredity" is the law, and that it works more surely in the transmission of evil than of good.

Then come the awful words bidding that generation "fill up the measure of the fathers." They are like the other command to Judas to do his work quickly. They are more than permission, they are command; but such a command as, by its laying bare of the true character of the deed in view, is love's last effort at prevention. Mark the growing emotion of the language. Mark the conception of a nation's sins as one through successive generations, and the other of these as having a definite measure, which being filled, judgment can no longer tarry. Generation after generation pours its contributions into the vessel, and when the last black drop which it can hold has been added, then comes the catastrophe. Mark the fatal necessity by which inherited sin becomes darker sin. The fathers' crimes are less than the sons'. This inheritance increases by each transmission. The clock strikes one more at each revolution of the hands.

It is hard to recognise Christ in the terrible words that follow. We have heard part of them from John

the Baptist ; and it sounded natural for him to call men serpents, and the children of serpents, but it is somewhat of a shock to hear Jesus hurling such names at even the most sinful. But let us remember that He who sees hearts has a right to tell harsh truths, and that it is truest kindness to strip off masks which hide from men their own real character, and that the revelation of the Divine love in Jesus would be a partial and impotent revelation if it did not show us the righteous love which is wrath. There is nothing so terrible as the anger of gentle compassion, and the fiercest and most destructive wrath is "the wrath of the Lamb." Seldom, indeed, did He show that side of His character ; but it is there, and the other would not be so blessed as it is unless this were there too.

The woe ends with the double prophecy that that generation would repeat and surpass the fathers' guilt, and that on it would fall the accumulated penalties of past bloodshed. Note that solemn "therefore," which looks back to the whole preceding context, and forward to the whole subsequent. Because the rulers professed abhorrence of their fathers' deeds, and yet inherited their spirit, they too would have their prophets, and would slay them. God goes on sending His messengers, because we reject them ; and the more deaf men are, the more does He peal His words into their ears. That is mercy and compassion, that all men may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth ; but it is judgment too, and its foreseen effect must be regarded as part of the Divine purpose in it. Christ's desire is one thing, His purpose another. His desire is that all should find in His gospel the savour of life ; but His

purpose is that, if it be not that to any, it shall be to them the savour of death. Mark, too, the authority with which He, in the face of these scowling Pharisees, assumes the distinct Divine prerogative of sending forth inspired men, who, as His messengers, shall stand on a level with the prophets of old. Mark His silence about His own fate, which is only obscurely hinted in the command to fill up the measure of the fathers. Observe the detailed enumeration of His messengers' gifts,—"prophets" under direct inspiration, like those of old, which may especially refer to the apostles ; "wise men," like a Stephen or an Apollos ; "scribes," such as Mark and Luke ; and many a faithful man since, whose pen has loved to write the name above every name. Note the detailed prophecy of their treatment, which begins with slaying, and goes down to the less severe scourging, and thence to the milder persecution. Do the three punishments belong to the three classes of messengers, the severest falling to the lot of the most highly endowed, and even the quiet penman being hunted from city to city ?

We need not wriggle and twist to try to avoid admitting that the calling of the martyred Zacharias, "the son of Barachias," is an error of some one's, who confused the author of the prophetic book with the person whose murder is narrated in 2 Chronicles xxiv. We do not know who made the mistake, or how it appears in our text, but it is not honest to try to slur it over. The punishment of long ages of sin, carried on from father to son, does in the course of that history of the world, which is a part of the judgment of the world, fall upon one generation. It takes centuries for the mass of heaped-

up sin to become top-heavy ; but when it is, it buries one generation of those who have worked at piling it up, beneath its down-rushing avalanche.

“ The mills of God grind slowly,
But they grind exceeding small.”

The catastrophes of national histories are prepared for by continuous centuries. The generation that laid the first powder-horn-full of the train are dead and buried long before the explosion which sends constituted order and institutions sky-high. The misery is that often the generation which has to pay the penalty has begun to awake to the sin, and would be glad to mend it, if it could. England in the seventeenth century, France in the eighteenth, America in the nineteenth, had to reap harvests from sins sown long before. Such is the law of the judgment wrought out by God's providence in history. But there is another judgment, begun here and perfected hereafter, in which fathers and sons shall each bear their own burden, and reap accurately the fruit of what they have sown. “ The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”

III. The parting wail of rejected love. The lightning flashes of the sevenfold woes end in a rain of pity and tears. His full heart overflows in that sad cry of lamentation over the long-continued foiling of the efforts of a love that would fain have fondled and defended. What intensity of feeling is in the redoubled naming of the city ! How yearningly and wistfully He calls, as if He might still win the faithless one, and how lingeringly unwilling He is to give up hope ! How mournfully, rather than accusingly, He reiterates the acts which had

run through the whole history, using a form of the verbs which suggests continuance, and is almost equivalent to nouns—"murderess," and "stoner"! Mark, too, the matter-of-course way in which Christ assumes that He sent all the prophets whom, through the generations, Jerusalem had stoned. But who can worthily speak the overflowing tenderness and condescension of the image of the mother-bird seeking to gather the chickens under her wings? It reminds one of the contrasted figure, in Deuteronomy, of the eagle bearing her young on her broad pinions. But Christ goes for His emblem to the barnyard. The lowlier creature more exalts the thing imaged. The chickens nestling under the mother's wings are in a warm, safe place, whatever birds of prey may be on the wing; and men pressing close beneath the covert of His wings feel the beat of His heart, and are sheltered from every evil. The patient, long-continued call of His love is wondrously set forth; and not less vividly the great mystery that men can, and the not smaller mystery that men will, refuse so sweet and sure a hiding place. "Ye would not" is the complaint of thwarted love, repelled and grieved rather than angry, and wondering at men's folly as much as at their sin. The silly chicken that will stray, heedless of the mother's call, will surely be snapped up by the hawk; and what can come to a man who will not have Christ's offered protection and love, except ruin?

So the lament passes into the solemn final leave-taking, with which our Lord closes His ministry among the Jews, and departs from the temple. As, in the parable of the marriage feast, the city was emphatically called "their city;" so, here, the temple, in whose

courts He was standing, and which He was to quit for ever in a moment, is called "your house," because His departure is the withdrawing of the true Shechinah. It had been the house of God; now He casts it off and leaves it to them to do as they will with it. The saddest punishment of long-continued rejection of His pleading love, is that it ceases at last to plead. The bitterest woe for those who refuse to render to Him the fruits of the vineyard, is to get the vineyard for their own, undisturbed. Christ's utmost retribution for obstinate blindness is to withdraw from our sight. All the woes that were yet to fall in long, dreary succession on that nation, so long continued in their sin, so long continued in their misery, were hidden in that solemn departure of Christ from the henceforward empty temple. Let us fear lest our unfaithfulness meet the like penalty ! But even the departure does not end His yearnings, nor close the long story of the conflict between God's beseeching love and their unbelief. The time shall come when the nation shall once more lift up, with deeper, truer adoration, the hosannas of the triumphal entry. And then a believing Israel shall see their King, and serve Him. Christ never takes final leave of any man in this world. It is ever possible that dumb lips shall be opened to welcome Him, though long rejected; and His withdrawals are His efforts to bring about that opening. When it takes place, how gladly does He return to the heart which is now His temple, and unveil His beauty to the long-darkened eyes !

LESSON XXXIX.

Watching for the King.

MATTHEW xxiv. 45-51.

45. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?

46. Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

47. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.

48. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart,

My lord delayeth his coming;

49. And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken;

50. The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of.

51. And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

THE long day's work was nearly done. Christ had left the temple, never to return. He took His way across the Mount of Olives to Bethany, and was stayed by the disciples' question as to the date of the destruction of the temple, which He had foretold, and of the "end of the world," which they attached to it. They could not fancy the world lasting without the temple! We often make a like mistake. So there, on the hill-side, looking across to the city lying in the sad, fading evening light, He spoke the prophecies of this chapter, which begin with the destruction of Jerusalem, and insensibly merge into the final coming of the Son

of man, of which that was a prelude and a type. The difficulty of accurately apportioning the details of the prophecy to the future events which fulfil them is common to it with all prophecy, of which it is a characteristic to blend events which, in the fulfilment, are far apart. From the mountain top, the eye travels over great stretches of country, but does not see the gorges, separating points which seem close together, foreshortened by distance.

There are many coming of the Son of man before His final coming for final judgment, and the nearer and smaller ones are themselves prophecies. So, we do not need to settle the chronology of unfulfilled prophecy in order to get the full benefit of Christ's teachings here. In its moral and spiritual effect on us, the uncertainty of the time of our going to Christ is nearly identical with the uncertainty of the time of His coming to us.

I. The command of watchfulness enforced by our ignorance of the time of His coming (vv. 43, 44). The two commands at the beginning and end of the paragraph are not quite the same. "Be ye ready" is the consequence of watchfulness. Nor are the two appended reasons the same; for the first command is grounded on His coming at a day when "ye *know* not," and the second on His coming "in an hour that ye *think* not;" that is to say, it not only is uncertain, but unexpected and surprising. There may also be a difference worth noting in the different designations of Christ as "your Lord," standing in a special relation to you, and as "the Son of man," of kindred with all men, and their Judge. What is this watchfulness? It is literally wakefulness. We are beset by perpetual temptations to sleep, to

spiritual drowsiness and torpor. "An opium sky rains down soporifics." And without continual effort our perception of the unseen realities and our alertness for service will be lulled to sleep. The religion of multitudes is a sleepy religion. Further, it is a vivid and ever-present conviction of His certain coming, and consequently a habitual realising of the transience of the existing order of things, and of the fast-approaching realities of the future. Further, it is keeping our minds in an attitude of expectation and desire, our eyes ever travelling to the dim distance to mark the far-off shining of His coming. What a miserable contrast to this is the temper of professing Christendom as a whole! It is swallowed up in the present, wide awake to interests and hopes belonging to this "bank and shoal of time," but sunk in slumber as to that great future, or, if ever the thought of it intrudes, shrinking, rather than desire, accompanies it, and it is soon hustled out of mind.

Christ bases His command on our ignorance of the time of His coming. It was no part of His purpose in His prophecy to remove that ignorance, and no calculations of the chronology of unfulfilled predictions have pierced the darkness. It was His purpose that from generation to generation His servants should be kept in the attitude of expectation, as of an event that may come at any time, and must come at some time. The parallel uncertainty of the time of death, though not what is meant here, serves the same moral end if rightly used, and is exposed to the same danger of being neglected because of the very uncertainty, which ought to be one chief reason for keeping it ever in view. Any future event, which combines these two things: absolute

certainty that it will happen, and utter uncertainty when it will happen, ought to have power to insist on being remembered, at least, till it was prepared for, and would have, if men were not such fools. Christ's coming would be oftener contemplated if it were more welcome. But what sort of a servant is he who has no glow of gladness at the thought of meeting his lord? True Christians are "all them that have loved His appearing."

The illustrative example which separates these two commands is remarkable. The householder's ignorance of the time when the thief would come is the reason why he does not watch. He cannot keep awake all night, and every night, to be ready for him; so he has to go to sleep, and is robbed. But our ignorance is the reason for wakefulness, because we can keep awake all the night of life. The householder watches to prevent, but we to share in, that for which the watch is kept. The figure of the thief is chosen to illustrate the one point of the unexpected stealthy approach. But is there not deep truth in it, to the effect that Christ's coming is like that of a robber, to those who are asleep, depriving them of earthly treasures? The word rendered "broken up" means literally "dug through," and points to a clay or mud house, common in the East, which is entered, not by bursting open doors or windows, but by digging through the wall. Death comes to men sunk in spiritual slumber, to strip them of good they would fain keep, and makes his entrance by a breach in the earthly house of this tabernacle. So St. Paul, in his earliest epistle, refers to this saying (a proof of the early diffusion of the gospel narrative), and says, "Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief."

II. The picture and reward of watchfulness. The general exhortation to watch is followed by a pair of contrasted parable portraits, primarily applicable to the apostles and to those "set over His household." But if we remember what Christ taught as the condition of pre-eminence in His kingdom, we shall not confine their application to an order.

"The least flower with a brimming cup may stand,
And share its dew-drop with another near,"

and the most slenderly endowed Christian has some crumb of the bread of life entrusted to him to dispense. It is to be observed that watchfulness is not mentioned in this portraiture of the watchful servant. It is presupposed as the basis and motive of his service. So we learn the double lesson that the attitude of continual outlook for the Lord is needed, if we are to discharge the tasks which He has set us, and that the true effect of watchfulness is to harness us to the car of duty. Many other motives actuate Christian faithfulness, but all are reinforced by this, and where it is feeble they are more or less inoperative. We cannot afford to lose its influence. A church or a soul which has ceased to be looking for Him will have let all its tasks drop from its drowsy hands, and will feel the power of other constraining motives of Christian service but faintly, as in a half-dream.

On the other hand, true waiting for Him is best expressed in the quiet discharge of accustomed and appointed tasks. The right place for the servant to be found, when the Lord comes, is "so doing" as He commands, however secular the task may be. That was

a wise judge who, when sudden darkness came on, and people thought the end of the world was at hand, said, "Bring lights, and let us go on with the case. We cannot be better employed, if the end has come, than in doing our duty." Flighty impatience of common tasks is not watching for the King, as Paul had to teach the Thessalonians, who were "shaken" in mind by the thought of the day of the Lord ; but the proper attitude is "that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business."

Observe, further, the interrogative form of the parable. The question is the sharp point which gives penetrating power, and suggests Christ's high estimate of the worth and difficulty of such conduct, and sets us to ask for ourselves, "Lord, is it I?" The servant is "faithful" inasmuch as he does his Lord's will, and rightly uses the goods entrusted to him, and "wise" inasmuch as he is "faithful." For a single-hearted devotion to Christ is the parent of insight into duty, and the best guide to conduct ; and whoever seeks only to be true to his Lord in the use of his gifts and possessions, will not lack prudence to guide him in giving to each his food, and that in due season. The two characteristics are connected in another way also ; for, if the outcome of faithfulness be taken into account, its wisdom is plain, and he who has been faithful even unto death will be seen to have been wise, though he gave up all, when the crown of eternal life sparkles on his forehead. Such faithfulness and wisdom (which are at bottom but two names for one course of conduct) find their motive in that watchfulness, which works as ever in the great Taskmaster's eye, and as ever keeping in view His coming, and its rendering account to Him.

The reward of the faithful servant is stated in language similar to that of the parable of the talents, which we have in a subsequent lesson. Faithfulness in a narrower sphere leads to a wider. The reward for true work is more work, of nobler sort and on a grander scale. That is true for earth and for heaven. If we do His will here, we shall one day exchange the subordinate place of the steward for the authority of the ruler, and the toil of the servant for the joy of the Lord. The soul that is joined to Christ and is one in will with Him, has all things for its servants ; and he who uses all things for his own and his brethren's highest good is their lord, while he walks amid the shadows of time, and will be lifted to loftier dominion over a grander world when he passes hence.

III. The picture and doom of the unwatchful servant. This portrait presupposes that a long period will elapse before Christ comes. The secret thought of the evil servant is the thought of a time far down the ages from the moment of our Lord's speaking. It would take centuries for such a temper to be developed in the Church. What is the temper? A secret dismissal of the anticipation of the Lord's return, and that not merely because He has been long in coming, but as thinking that He has broken His word, and has not come when He said He would. This unspoken dimming over of the expectation and unconfessed doubt of the firmness of the promise, is the natural product of the long time of apparent delay which the Church has had to encounter. It will cloud and depress the religion of later ages, unless there be constant effort to resist the tendency and to keep awake. The first generations were all aflame with

the glad hope “Maranatha,”—“The Lord is at hand.” Their successors gradually lost the keenness of expectation, and at most cried, “Will not He come soon?” Their successors saw the starry hope through thickening mists of years; and now it scarcely shines for many, or at least is but a dim point, when it should blaze as a sun.

It was an “evil” servant who said so in his heart. He was evil because he said it, and he said it because he was evil; for the yielding to sin and the withdrawal of love from Jesus dims the desire for His coming, and makes the whisper that He delays a hope; while, on the other hand, the hope that He delays helps to open the sluices, and let sin flood the life. So an outburst of cruel masterfulness and of riotous sensuality is the consequence of the dimmed expectation. There would have been no usurpation of authority over Christ’s heritage by priest or pope, or any other, if that hope had not become faint. If professing Christians lived with the great white throne, and the heavens and earth fleeing away before Him that sits on it, ever burning before their inward eye, how could they wallow amid the mire of animal indulgence? The corruptions of the Church, especially of its official members, are traced with sad and prescient hand in these foreboding words, which are none the less a prophecy because cast by His forbearing gentleness in the milder form of a supposition.

The dreadful doom of the unwatchful servant is cast into a form of awful severity. The cruel punishment of sawing asunder, which, tradition says, was suffered by Isaiah, and was not unfamiliar in old times, is his. What concealed terror of retribution it signifies we do

not know. Perhaps it points to a fate in which a man shall be, as it were, parted into two, each at enmity with the other. Perhaps it implies a retribution in kind for his sin, which consisted, as the next clause implies, in hypocrisy, which is the sundering in twain of inward conviction and practice, and is avenged by a like but worse rending apart of conscience and will. At all events, it shadows a fearful retribution, which is not extinction, inasmuch as, in the next clause, we read that his portion—his lot or that condition which belongs to him by virtue of his character—is with the hypocrites. He was one of them, because, while he said “my lord,” he had ceased to love and obey, having ceased to desire and expect; and therefore whatever be their fate shall be his, even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and setting eternal discord among the thoughts and intents of the heart. That is not the punishment of unwatchfulness, but of what unwatchfulness leads to, if unawakened. Let these words of the King ring an alarum for us all, and rouse our sleepy souls to watch, as becomes the children of the day.

LESSON XL.

The Waiting Maidens.

MATTHEW xxv. 1-13.

1. Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the Bridegroom.

2. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

3. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

4. But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

5. While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

6. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

7. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

8. And the foolish said unto

the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.

9. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

10. And while they went to buy, the Bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with Him to the marriage: and the door was shut.

11. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

12. But He answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

13. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."

WE shall best understand this beautiful but difficult parable if we look on to its close. Our Lord appends to it the refrain of all this context, the exhortation to watch, based upon our ignorance of the time of His coming. But as in the former little parable of the wise servant it was his faithful, wise dispensing of his

lord's goods, and not his watchfulness, which was the point of the eulogium passed on him, so here it is the readiness of the wise virgins to take their places in the wedding march which is commended. That readiness consists in their having their lamps burning and their oil in store. This, then, is the main thing in the parable. It is an exhibition, under another aspect, of what constitutes fitness for entrance into the festal chamber of the bridegroom, which had just been set forth as consisting in faithful stewardship. Here it is presented as being the possession of lamp and oil.

I. The first consideration, then, must be, What is the meaning of these emblems? A great deal of fine-spun ingenuity has been expended on subordinate points in the parable, such as the significance of the number of maidens, the conclusions from the equal division into wise and foolish, the place from which they came to meet the Bridegroom, the point at the marriage procession where they are supposed to join it, whether it was going to fetch the bride, or coming back with her; whether the feast is held in her house, or in his, and so on. But all these are unimportant questions, and as Christ has left them in the background, we only destroy the perspective by dragging them into the front. In no parable is it more important than in this to restrain the temptation to run out analogies into their last results. The remembrance that the virgins, as the emblem of the whole body of the visible Church, are the same as the bride, who does not appear in the parable, might warn against such an error. They were ten, as being the usual number for such a company, or as being the round number, naturally employed when definiteness

was not sought. They were divided equally, not because our Lord desired to tell, but because He wished to leave unnoticed, the numerical proportion of the two classes. One set are "wise" and the other "foolish," because He wishes to show not only the sin, but the absurdity, of unreadiness, and to teach us that true wisdom is not of the head only, but far more of the heart. The conduct of the two groups of maidens is looked at from the prudent and common-sense standpoint, and the provident action of the one sets in relief the reckless stupidity of the others.

There have been many opinions as to the meaning of the lamps and the oil, which it is needless to repeat. Surely the analogy of scriptural symbolism is our best guide. If we follow it, we get a meaning which perfectly suits the emblems and the whole parable. In the Sermon on the Mount our Lord uses the same figure of the lamp, and explains it, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works."

"So shines a good deed in a naughty world." The virgins waiting for their Lord, with the bright dots of their lamps staring the midnight, are a lovely picture of the expectant Church, each member a little centre of light, raying out beams of purity. The lamps, then, according to Scripture symbolism, and by natural fitness, represent the visible side of the Christian character, as a manifestation in outward act of righteousness. All the external Christian life is included in it. That being so, the oil must be the inward principle which feeds the flame, the deep, secret nourishment which flames before all eyes in the radiance of the light, and chiefly, according to the emblem that runs all through the Bible, the

true inward source of all real outward holiness, namely, the gift of the Divine Spirit. It seems impossible, in any interpretation of the parable which is to keep within the lines of recognised Biblical usage, to attach another meaning to it. Zechariah's prophecy (Zech. iv.) is the classical passage which ought to determine the explanation here.

The wise, then, represent such professing Christians as have both the outward and the inward holiness ; while the foolish are those who content themselves with the appearance of holiness, the form of godliness without the power which produces it. It is generally assumed that the foolish maidens had some oil in their lamps to start with, and their folly is supposed to be that they did not seek to make provision for keeping up the supply. Whence the conclusion is drawn, that the main purpose of the parable is, as Calvin puts it, to teach that it is not enough "to have been once for all ready, unless we endure to the end." But it is not said that they had ever any oil at all, and there is no question of apostasy ; for their lamps burn on, like those of the others, till the Bridegroom comes. With Calvin's name to take shelter under, nobody need be afraid of admitting the possibility of lamps, once fed with oil, running dry and going out ; but that does not seem to us the lesson of the story. But it may be said a lamp cannot burn without oil, therefore they must have had some to begin with. But is this so ? Cannot the lamps of which Christ is speaking burn without oil ? Is there no such thing possible as "a flaming profession" without any reality below it ? Do we not meet over and over again, under a variety of metaphors, sheep and goats, good and bad fish, wheat

and tares, the same contrast between real and apparent disciples? True, there can be no right burning of the lamp of a Christian profession without the oil of the Spirit in the vessel of the heart; but there may be a flare which looks much the same in the dark. A dry wick will burn, though smokily. The stupendous folly of these witless five was not that they made no provision for the future, but that they did not understand the requirements of the present. What they did was as absurd as it is to light a lamp without oil. They were not hypocrites in the sense of consciously pretending to be what they were not; but they thought outward profession and the doing of certain acts enough to make them of the Bridegroom's company. They stuck rootless flowers in their gardens, as children do, and thought they would smell sweet in His nostrils. If anybody says that such an explanation makes out the foolish virgins to be too foolish, let him ask whether they were any more ridiculous than thousands of nominal Christians are to-day, who trust to their outward acts, and have no soft-flowing grace of the Divine Spirit insinuating a new life into their spirits.

II. Note the sleep of all the virgins. No blame is hinted on account of it. It is not inconsistent with the wisdom of the wise, nor does it interfere with their readiness to meet the Bridegroom. It is, then, such a sleep as is compatible with watching. Our Lord's introduction of this point is an example of His merciful allowance for our weakness. There must be a certain slackening of the tension of expectation when the Bridegroom tarries. Centuries of delay cannot but modify the attitude of the waiting Church, and Jesus here implies

that there shall be a long stretch of time before the advent, during which all His people will feel the natural effect of the deferring of hope. But the sleep which He permits, unblamed, is light, and such as one takes by snatches when waiting to be called. He does not ask us always to be on tiptoe of expectation, nor to refuse the teaching of experience; but counts that we have watched aright, if we wake from our light slumbers when the cry is heard, and have our lamps lit, ready for the procession.

III. Then comes the midnight cry and the waking of the maidens. The hour “of night’s black arch the keystone” suggests the unexpectedness of His coming; the loudness of the cry, its all-awaking effect; the broken words of the true reading, “Behold, the Bridegroom!” the closeness on the heels of the heralds with which the procession flashes through the darkness. The virgins had “gone forth to meet Him,” at the beginning of the parable, but the going forth to which they are now summoned is not the same.

The Christian soul goes forth once when, at the beginning of its Christian life, it forsakes the world to wait for and on Christ, and again, when it leaves the world, to pass with Him into the banquet. Life is the slumber from which some are awaked by the voice of death, and some who “remain” shall be awaked by the trumpet of judgment. There is no interval between the cry and the appearance of the Bridegroom; only a moment to rouse themselves, to look to their lamps, the hurried, frightened words of the foolish, and the answer of the wise, and then the procession is upon them. It is all done as in a flash, “in a moment, in the twinkling

of an eye." This impression of swiftness, which leaves no time for delayed preparation, is the uniform impression conveyed by all the Scripture references to the coming of the Lord. The swoop of the eagle, the fierce blaze of lightning from one side of the sky to the other, the bursting of the flood, that morning's work at Sodom, not begun till dawn and finished before the "sun was risen on the earth," are its types. Foolish indeed to postpone preparation till that moment when cry and coming are simultaneous, like lightning and thunder right overhead!

The foolish virgins' imploring request and its answer are not to be pressed, as if they meant more than to set forth the hopelessness of then attempting to procure the wanting oil, and especially the hopelessness of attempting to get it from one's fellows. There is a world of suppressed terror and surprise in that "our lamps are going out." Note that they burned till the Bridegroom came, and then, like the magic lamps in old legends, at His approach shivered into darkness. Is not that true of the formal, outward religion, which survives everything but contact with His all-seeing eyes and perfect judgment? These foolish maidens were as much astonished as alarmed at seeing their lights flicker down to extinction; and it is possible for professing Christians to live a lifetime, and never to be found out either by themselves or by anybody else. But if there has been no oil in the lamp, it will be quenched when He appears. The atmosphere that surrounds His throne acts like oxygen on the oil-fed flame, and like carbonic acid gas on the other.

The answer of the wise is not selfishness. It is not from our fellows, however bright their lamps, that we

can ever get that inward grace. None of them has more than suffices for his own needs, nor can any give it to another. It may be bought, on the same terms as the pearl of great price was bought, "without money;" but the market is closed, as on a holy day, on the day of the King's Son's marriage. That is not touched upon here, except in so far as it is hinted at in the absence of the foolish when He enters the banqueting chamber, and in their fruitless prayer. They had no time to get the oil before He came, and they had not got it when they returned. The lesson is plain. We can only get the new life of the spirit, which will make our lives a light, from God; and we can get it now, not then.

IV. We see the wise virgins within and the foolish without. They are, indeed, no longer designated by these adjectives, but as "ready" and "the others;" for preparedness is fitness, and they who are found of Him in possession of the outward righteousness and of its inward source, His own Divine life in them, are prepared. To such the gates of the festal chamber fly open. In that day place is the outcome of character, and it is equally impossible for the "ready" to be shut out, and for "the others" to go in.

"When the Bridegroom with His feastful friends passes to bliss at the mid hour of night," they who have "filled their odorous lamps with deeds of light" have surely "gained their entrance." There is silence about the unspeakable joys of the wedding feast. Some faint sounds of music and dancing, some gleams from the lighted windows, find their way out; but the closed doors keep their secret, and only the guests know the gladness.

That closed door means security, perpetuity, untold blessedness. But it means exclusion too. The piteous reiterated call of the shut-out maidens, roused too late, and so suddenly, from songs and laughter to vain cries, evokes a stern answer, through which shines the awful reality veiled in the parable. We do not need to regard the prayer for entrance, and its refusal, as conveying more than the fruitlessness of wishes for entrance then, when unaccompanied with fitness to enter. Such desire as is expressed in this passionate beating at the closed door, with hoarse entreaties, is not fitness. If it were, the door would open ; and the reason why it does not lies in the Bridegroom's awful answer, "I know you not." The absence of the qualification prevents His recognising them as His. Surely the unalleviated darkness of a hopeless exclusion settles down on these sad five, standing, huddled together, at the door, with the extinguished lamps hanging in their despairing hands. "Too late, too late, ye cannot enter now." The wedding bell has become a funeral knell. They were not the enemies of the Bridegroom, they thought themselves His friends. They let life ebb without securing the one thing needful, and the neglect was irremediable. There is a tragedy underlying many a life of outward religiousness and inward emptiness, and a dreadful discovery will flare in upon such, when they have to say to themselves,—

"This might have been once,
And we missed it, lost it for ever."

LESSON XLI.

Traders for the Master.

MATTHEW XXV. 14-30.

14. For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

15. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.

16. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents.

17. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.

18. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

19. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

20. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.

21. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

22. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents, behold I have gained two other talents beside them.

23. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

24. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed:

25. And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.

26. His lord answered and

said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strayed :

27. Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.

28. Take therefore the talent

from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

29. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

30. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

THE parable of the Ten Virgins said nothing about their working whilst they waited. This one sets forth that side of the duties of the servants in their master's absence, and so completes the former. It is clearly in its true historical connection here, and is closely knit to both the preceding and following context. It is a strange instance of superficial reading that it should ever have been supposed to be but another version of Luke's parable of the pounds. The very resemblances of the two are meant to give force to their differences, which are fundamental. They are the converse of each other; that of the pounds teaching that men who have the same gifts entrusted to them may make a widely different use of these, and will be rewarded differently; in strictly graduated proportion to their unlike diligence. The lesson of the parable before us, on the other hand, is that men with dissimilar gifts may employ them with equal diligence; and that, if they do, their reward shall be the same, however great the endowments of one, and slender those of another. A reader who has missed that distinction must be very short-sighted, or sworn to make out a case against the Gospels.

I. We may consider the lent capital and the business done with it. Masters nowadays do not give servants

their money to trade with when they leave home ; but the incident is true to the old-world relations of master and slave. Our Lord's consciousness of His near departure, which throbs in all this context, comes out emphatically here. He is preparing His disciples for the time when they will have to work without Him, like the managers of some branch house of business whose principal has gone abroad. What are the "talents" with which He will start them on their own account ? We have taken the word into common language, however little we remember the teaching of the parable as to the hand that gives men "of talent" their endowments. But the natural gifts usually called by the name are not what Christ means here, though the principles of the parable may be extended to include them. For these are the "ability" according to which the talents are given. But the talents themselves are the spiritual knowledge and endowments which are properly the gifts of the ascended Lord to His Church. Two important lessons as to these are conveyed. First, that they are distributed in varying measure, and that not arbitrarily, by the mere will of the giver, but according to His discernment of what each servant can profitably administer. The "ability" which settles their amount is not more closely defined. It may include natural faculty, for Christ's gifts usually follow the line of that ; and the larger the nature, the more of Him it can contain. But it also includes spiritual receptiveness and faithfulness, which increases the absorbing power. The capacity to receive will also be the capacity to administer, and it will be fully filled. The second lesson taught is that spiritual gifts are given for trading with. In other words, they are here considered not so

much as blessings to the possessor as His stock in trade, which He can employ for the Master's enrichment. We are all tempted to think of them mostly as given us for our own blessing and joy ; and the reminder is never unseasonable that a Christian receives nothing for himself alone. God hath shined into our hearts, that we may give to others the light of the knowledge which has flashed glad day into our darkness. The Master entrusts us with a portion of His wealth, not for expending on ourselves, but for trading with. A third principle here is that the right use of His gifts increases them in our hands. "Money makes money." The five talents grow to ten, the two to four. The surest way to increase our possession of Christ's grace is to try to impart it. There is no better way of strengthening our own faith than to seek to make others share in it. Christian convictions, spoken, are confirmed, but muffled in silence are weakened. "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth." Seed heaped and locked up in a granary breeds weevils and moths ; flung broadcast over the furrows, it multiplies into seed that can be sown again, and bread that feeds the sower. So we have in this part of the parable almost the complete summary of the principles on which, the purposes for which, and the results to faithful use with which, Christ gives His gifts.

The conduct of the slenderly endowed servant who hides his talent will be considered farther on.

II. We note the faithful servants' balance sheet and reward. Our Lord again sounds the note of delay,— "After a long time,"—an indefinite phrase which we know carries centuries in its folds, how many more we know not, nor are intended to know. The two faithful servants

present their balance sheet in identical words, and receive the same commendation and reward. Their speech is in sharp contrast with the idle one's excuse, inasmuch as it puts a glad acknowledgment of the lord's giving in the forefront, as if to teach that the thankful recognition of His liberality underlies all joyful and successful service, and deepens while it makes glad the sense of responsibility. The cords of love are silken ; and he who begins with setting before himself the largeness of Christ's gifts to him, will not fail in using these so as to increase them. In the light of that day the servant sees more clearly than when he was at work the results of his work. We do not know what the year's profits have been till stock-taking and balancing. Here we often say, "I have laboured in vain." There we shall say, "I have gained five talents." The verbatim repetition of the lord's words to both servants teaches the great lesson of this parable as contrasted with that of the pounds, that where there has been the same faithful work, with different amounts of capital, there will be the same reward. Our Master does not care about quantity, but about quality and motive. The slave with a few pence, enough to stock meagrely a little stall, may show as much business capacity, diligence, and fidelity, as if he had millions to work with. Christ rewards not actions, but the graces which are made visible in actions ; and these can be as well seen in the tiniest as in the largest deeds. The light that streams through a pin-prick is the same as pours through the widest window. The crystals of a salt present the same faces, flashing back the sun at the same angles, whether they be large or microscopically small. Therefore the judgment of

Christ, which is simply the utterance of fact, takes no heed of the extent, but only of the kind of service, and puts in the same level of recompense all who, with however widely varying powers, were one in spirit, in diligence, and devotion. The eulogium on the servants is not “successful” or brilliant,” but “faithful,” and both alike get it.

The words of the lord fall into three parts. First comes his generous and hearty praise,—the brief and emphatic monosyllable “Well,” and the characterisation of the servants as “good and faithful.” Praise from Christ’s lips is praise indeed ; and here He pours it out in no grudging or scanty measure, but with warmth and evident delight. His heart glows with pleasure, and His commendation is musical with the utterance of His own joy in His servants. He “rejoices over them with singing ;” and more gladly than a fond mother speaks honeyed words of approval to her darling, of whose goodness she is proud, does He praise these two. When we are tempted to disparage our slender powers as compared with those of His more conspicuous servants, and to suppose that all we do is nought, let us think of this merciful and loving estimate of our poor service. For such words from such lips, life itself were wisely flung away ; but such words from such lips will be spoken in recognition of many a piece of service less high and heroic than that. “Good and faithful” refers not to the more general notion of goodness, but to the special excellence of a servant, and the latter word seems to define the former. Fidelity is the grace which He praises,—manifested in the recognition that the capital was a loan, and given to be traded with for Him, and to

be brought back increased to Him. He is faithful who ever keeps in view, and acts on the conditions on which, and purposes for which, he has received his spiritual wealth ; and he who is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much.

The second part of the lord's words is the appointment to higher office, as reward of faithfulness. Here on earth the tools come, in the long run, to the hands that can use them, and the best reward of faithfulness in a narrower sphere is to be lifted to a wider. Promotion means more to do ; and if the world were rightly organised, the road to advancement would be diligence ; and the higher a man climbed, the wider would be the field of his labour. It is so in Christ's kingdom, and should be so in His visible Church. It will be so in heaven. Clearly this saying implies the active theory of the future life, and the continuance in some ministry of love, unknown to us, of the energies which were trained in the small transactions of earth. "If five talents are 'a few things,' how great the 'many things' will be !" (Bengel). In the parable of the pounds the servant is made a ruler ; here being "set over" seems rather to mean only the place of a steward or servant still. The sphere is enlarged, but the office is unaltered. The manager who conducted a small trade rightly will be advanced to the superintendence of a larger business.

"We doubt not that for one so true
There must be other nobler work to do,"

and that in it too the same law shall continue to operate, and faithfulness will be crowned with ever-growing capacities and tasks through a dateless eternity.

The last words of the lord pass beyond our poor attempts at commenting. No eye can look undazzled at the sun. When Christ was near the cross, He left His disciples a strange bequest at such a moment,—His joy ; and that is their brightest portion here, even though it be shaded with many sorrows. The enthroned Christ welcomes all who have known the fellowship of His sufferings into the fulness of His heavenly joy, unshaded, unbroken, unspeakable ; and they pass into it as into an encompassing atmosphere, or some broad land of peace and abundance. Sympathy with His purposes leads to such oneness with Him that His joy is ours, both in its occasions and in its rapture. “Thou makest them drink of the river of Thy pleasures,” and the lord and the servant drink from the same cup.

III. The excuse and punishment of the indolent servant. His excuse is his reason. He did think hardly of his lord, and, even though he had his gift in his hand to confute him, he slandered him in his heart as harsh and exacting. To many men the requirements of religion are more prominent than its gifts, and God is thought of as the demanding rather than as the giving God. Such thoughts paralyse action. Fear is barren, love is fruitful. Nothing grows on the mountain of curses, which frowns black over against the sunny slopes of the mountain of blessing with its blushing grapes. The indolence was illogical, for, if the master was such as he thought, the more reason for diligence ; but fear is a bad reasoner, and the absurd gap between the premises and the conclusion is matched by one of the very same width in every life, which thinks of God as rigidly requiring obedience, which, therefore, it does

not give! Still another error is in the indolent servant's words. He flings down the hoarded talent with, "Lo, thou hast thine own." He was mistaken. Talents hid are not dug up as heavy as they were when buried. This gold does rust, and a life not devoted to God is never carried back to Him unspoiled.

The lord's answer again falls into three, corresponding to that to the other servants. First comes the stern characterisation of the man. As with the others' goodness, his badness is defined by the second epithet. It is slothfulness. Is that all? Yes; it does not need active opposition to pull down destruction on one's head. Simple indolence is enough, the negative sin of not doing or being what we ought. Ungirt loins, unlit lamps, unused talents, sink a man like lead. Doing nothing is enough for ruin.

The remarkable answer to the servant's charge seems to teach us that timid souls, conscious of slender endowments, and pressed by the heavy sense of responsibility, and shrinking from Christian enterprises for fear of incurring heavier condemnation, may yet find means of using their little capital. The bankers, who invest the collective contributions of small capitalists to advantage, may, or may not, be intended to be translated into the Church; but, at any rate, the principle of united service is here recommended to those who feel too weak for independent action. A row of slim houses hold each other up; and, if we cannot strike out a path for ourselves, let us seek strength and safety in numbers.

The fate of the indolent servant has a double horror. It is loss and suffering. The talent is taken from the slack hands and coward heart that would not use it, and

given to the man who had shown he could and would. Gifts unemployed for Christ are stripped off a soul yonder. How much will go from many a richly endowed spirit, which here flashed with unconsecrated genius and force! We do not need to wait for eternity to see that true possession, which is use, increases powers, and that the disuse, which is equivalent to not possessing, robs of them. The blacksmith's arm, the scout's eye, the craftsman's delicate finger, the student's intellect, the sensualist's passions, all illustrate the law on its one side; and the dying out of faculties and tastes, and even of intuitions and conscience, by reason of simple disuse, are melancholy instances of it on the other. But the solemn words of this condemnation seem to point to a far more awful energy in its working in the future, when everything that has not been consecrated by employment for Jesus shall be taken away, and the soul, stripped of its garb, shall "be found naked." How far that process of divesting may go on faculties, without touching the life, who can tell? Enough to see with awe that a spirit may be cut, as it were, to the quick, and still exist.

But loss is not all the indolent servant's doom. Once more, like the slow toll of a funeral bell, we hear the dread sentence of ejection to the mirk midnight without, where are tears undried and passion unavailing. There is something very awful in the monotonous repetition of that sentence so often in these last discourses of Christ's. The most loving lips that ever spoke have, in love, shaped this form of words, so heart touching in their wailing but decisive proclamation of blackness, homelessness, and sorrow, and cannot but toll them over and over again into our ears, in sad knowledge of

our forgetfulness and unbelief,—if perchance we may listen and be warned, and, having heard the sound thereof, may never know the reality of that death in life which is the sure end of the indolent who were blind to His gifts, and therefore would not listen to His requirements.

LESSON XLII.

The King on His Judgment Throne.

MATTHEW xxv. 31-46.

31. When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory:

32. And before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

33. And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

34. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35. For I was an hungry, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in:

36. Naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me.

37. Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungry, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink?

38. When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee?

39. Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee?

40. And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.

41. Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

42. For I was an hungry, and ye gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink:

43. I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in: naked, and ye clothed Me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me not.

44. Then shall they also answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee?

45. Then shall He answer

them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me.

46. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

THE teachings of that wonderful last day of Christ's ministry, which have occupied so many of our lessons, are closed with this tremendous picture of universal judgment. It is one to be gazed upon with silent awe, rather than to be commented on. There is fear lest, in occupying the mind in the study of the details, and trying to pierce the mystery it partly unfolds, we should forget our own individual share in it. Better to burn in on our hearts the thought, "I shall be there," than to lose the solemn impression in efforts to unravel the difficulties of the passage. Difficulties there are, as is to be expected in even Christ's revelation of so unparalleled a scene. Many questions are raised by it which will never be solved till we stand there. Who can tell how much of the parabolic element enters into the description? We, at all events, do not venture to say of one part, "This is merely drapery, the sensuous representation of spiritual reality," and of another "That is essential truth." The curtain is the picture, and before we can separate the elements of it in that fashion, we must have lived through it. Let us try to grasp the main lessons, and not lose the spirit in studying the letter.

I. The first broad teaching is that Christ is the Judge of all the earth. Sitting there, a wearied man on the Mount of Olives, with the valley of Jehoshaphat at His feet, which the Jew regarded as the scene of the final judgment, Jesus declared Himself to be the Judge of the world, in language so unlimited in its claims that the speaker must be either a madman or a god. Calvary was

less than three days off when He spoke thus ! The contrast between the vision of the future and the reality of the present is overwhelming. The Son of man has come in weakness and shame ; He will come in His glory, that flashing light of the self-revealing God, of which the symbol was the “glory” which shone between the cherubim, and which Jesus Christ here asserts to belong to Him as “His glory.” Then heaven will be emptied of its angels, who shall gather round the enthroned Judge as His handful of sorrowing followers were clustered round Him as He spoke, or as the peasants had surrounded the meek state of His entry yesterday. Then He shall take the place of Judge, and “sit,” in token of repose, supremacy, and judgment, “on the throne of His glory,” as He now sat on the rocks of Olivet. Then mankind shall be massed at His feet, and His glance shall part the infinite multitudes, and discern the character of each item in the crowd as easily and swiftly as the shepherd’s eye picks out the black goats from among the white sheep. Observe the difference in the representation from those in the previous parables. There the parting of kinds was either self-acting, as in the case of the foolish maidens ; or men gave account of themselves, as in the case of the servants with the talents. Here the separation is the work of the Judge, and is completed before a word is spoken. All these representations must be included in the complete truth as to the final judgment. It is the effect of men’s actions ; it is the result of their compelled disclosing of the deepest motives of their lives ; it is the act of the perfect discernment of the Judge. Their deeds will judge them ; they will judge themselves ; Christ will judge. Singularly

enough, every possible interpretation of the extent of the expression “all nations” has found advocates. It has been taken in its widest and plainest meaning as equivalent to the whole race ; it has been confined to mankind exclusive of Christians, and it has been confined to Christians exclusive of heathens. There are difficulties in all these explanations, but probably the least are found in the first. It is most natural to suppose that “all nations” means all nations, unless that meaning be impossible. The absence of the limitation to the “kingdom of heaven,” which distinguishes this section from the preceding ones having reference to judgment, and the position of the present section as the solemn close of Christ’s teachings, which would naturally widen out into the declaration of the universal judgment, which forms the only appropriate climax and end to the foregoing teachings, seem to point to the widest meaning of the phrase. His office of universal judge is unmistakably taught throughout the New Testament, and it seems in the highest degree unnatural to suppose that He did not speak of it in these final words of prophetic warning. We may therefore with some confidence see in the magnificent and awful picture here drawn the vision of universal judgment. Parabolic elements there no doubt are in the picture ; but we have no governing revelation, free from these, by which we can check them, and be sure of how much is form and how much substance. This is clear, that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” ; and this is clear, that Jesus Christ put forth, when at the very lowest point of His earthly humiliation, these tremendous claims, and asserted His authority as Judge over every soul of man. We are apt

to lose ourselves in the crowd. Let us pause and think that "all" includes "me."

II. Note the principles of Christ's universal judgment. It is important to remember that this section closes a series of descriptions of the judgment, and must not be taken as if, when isolated, it set forth all the truth. It is often harped upon by persons who are unfriendly to evangelical teaching, as if it were Christ's only word about judgment, and interpreted as if it meant that, no matter what else a man is if only he is charitable and benevolent, he will find mercy. But this is to forget all the rest of our Lord's teaching in the context, and to fly in the face of the whole tenor of New Testament doctrine. We have here to do with the principles of judgment which apply equally to those who have, and to those who have not, heard the gospel. The subjects of the kingdom have the principles more immediately applicable to them in the previous parables, and here they are reminded that there is a standard of judgment absolutely universal. All men, whether Christians or not, are judged by "the things done in his body, whether it be good or bad." So Christ teaches in His closing words of the Sermon on the Mount, and in many another place. "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." The productive source of good works is not in question here; stress is laid on the fruits rather than on the root. The gospel is as imperative in its requirements of righteousness as the law, and its conception of the righteousness which it requires is far deeper and wider. The subjects of the kingdom ever need to be reminded of the solemn truth that they have not only, like the wise maidens, to have their lights burning and

their oil vessels filled, nor only, like the wise servants, to be using the gifts of the kingdom for their lord, but, as members of the great family of man, have to cultivate the common moralities which all men, heathen and Christian, recognise as binding on all, without which no man shall see the Lord. The special form of righteousness which is selected as the test is charity. Obviously it is chosen as representative of all the virtues of the second table of the law. Taken in its bare literality, this would mean that men's relations to God had no effect in the judgment, and that no other virtues but this of charity came into the account. Such a conclusion is so plainly repugnant to all Christ's teaching that we must suppose that love to one's neighbour is here singled out, just as it is in His summary of "the law and the prophets" as the crown and flower of all relative duties, and as, in a very real sense, being "the fulfilling of the law." The omission of any reference to the love of God sufficiently shows that the view here is rigidly limited to acts, and that all the grounds of judgment are not meant to be set forth.

But the benevolence here spoken of is not the mere natural sentiment, which often exists in great energy in men whose moral nature is, in other respects, so utterly un-Christlike that their entrance into the kingdom prepared for the righteous is inconceivable. Many a man has a hundred vices, and yet a soft heart. It is very much a matter of temperament. Does Christ so contradict all the rest of His teaching as to say that such a man is of "the sheep," and "blessed of the Father"? Surely not. Is every piece of kindness to the distressed, from whatever motive, and by whatsoever kind

of person done, regarded by Him as done to Himself? To say so would be to confound moral distinctions, and to dissolve all righteousness into a sentimental syrup. The deeds which He regards as done to Himself, are done to His "brethren." That expression carries us into the region of motive, and runs parallel with His other words about receiving a prophet, and giving a cup of cold water to one of these little ones, because they are His. Seeing that all nations are at the bar, the expression "My brethren" cannot be confined to the disciples, for many of those who are being judged have never come in contact with Christians; nor can it be reasonably supposed to include all men, for, however true it is that Christ is every man's Brother, the recognition of kindred here must surely be confined to those at the right hand. Whatever be included under the "righteous," that is included under the "brethren." We seem, then, led to recognise a reference to the motive of the beneficence in the expression, and to be brought to the conclusion that what the Judge accepts as done to Himself is such kindly help and sympathy as is extended to these His kindred, with some recognition of their character, and desire after it. To "receive a prophet" implies that there is some spiritual affinity with Him in the receiver. To give help to His brethren, because they are so, implies some affinity with Him, or feeling after likeness to Him and them. Now, if we hold fast by the universality of the judgment here depicted, we shall see that this recognition must necessarily have different degrees in those who have heard of Christ and in those who have not. In the former it will be equivalent to that faith which is the root of all

goodness, and grasps the Christ revealed in the Gospel. In the latter it can be no more than a feeling after Him who is the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Surely there are souls amid the darkness of heathenism yearning toward the light, like plants grown in the dark. By ways of His own Christ can reach such hearts, as the river of the water of life may percolate through underground channels to many a tree which grows far from its banks.

III. Note the surprises of the judgment. The astonishment of the righteous is not modesty disclaiming praise, but real wonder at the undreamed-of significance of their deeds. In the parable of the talents the servants unveiled their inmost hearts, and accurately described their lives. Here, the other side of the truth is brought into prominence, that, at that day, we shall be surprised when we hear from His lips what we have really done. True, the Christian beneficence has consciously for its motive the pleasing of Christ; but still he who most earnestly strove, while here, to do all as unto Jesus, will be full of thankful wonder at the grace which accepts his poor service, and will learn, with fresh marvelling, how closely He associates Himself with His humblest servant. There is an element of mystery hidden from ourselves in all our deeds. Our love to Christ's followers never goes out so plainly to Him that, while here, we can venture to be sure that He takes it as done for Him. We cannot here follow the flight of the arrow, nor know what meaning He will attach to, or what large issues He will evolve from, our poor doings. So heaven will be full of blessed surprises, as we reap the fruit growing "in power" of what we sowed "in weakness," and as

doeful will be the astonishment which will seize those who see, for the first time, in the lurid light of that day, the true character of their lives, as one long neglect of plain duties, which was all a defrauding the Saviour of His due. Mere doing nothing is enough to condemn, and its victims will be shudderingly amazed at the fatal wound it has inflicted on them.

IV. The irrevocableness of the judgment. That is an awful contrast between the "Come, ye blessed," and "Depart, ye cursed." That is a more awful parallel between "eternal punishment" and "eternal life." It is futile to attempt to alleviate the awfulness by emptying the word "eternal" of reference to duration. It no doubt connotes quality, but its first meaning is ever-during. There is nothing here to suggest that the one condition is more terminable than the other. Rather, the emphatic repetition of the word brings the unending continuance of each into prominence, as the point in which these two states, so wofully unlike, are the same. In whatever other passages the doctrine of universal restoration may seem to find a foothold, there is not an inch of standing-room for it here. Reverently accepting Christ's words as those of perfect and infallible love, the present writer feels so strongly the difficulty of bringing all the New Testament declarations on this dread question into a harmonious whole, that he abjures for himself dogmatic certainty, and dreads lest, in the eagerness of discussing the duration (which will never be beyond the reach of discussion), the solemn reality of the fact of future retribution should be dimmed, and men should argue about "the terror of the Lord" till they cease to feel it.

LESSON XLIII.

The New Passover.

MATTHEW xxvi. 17-30.

17. Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto Him, Where wilt Thou that we prepare for Thee to eat the Passover?

18. And He said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at thy house with My disciples.

19. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the Passover.

20. Now when the even was come, He sat down with the twelve.

21. And as they did eat, He said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me.

22. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto Him, Lord, is it I?

23. And He answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with Me in the dish, the same shall betray Me.

24. The Son of man goeth as it is written of Him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.

25. Then Judas, which betrayed Him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto unto him, Thou hast said.

26. And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take eat; this is My body.

27. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;

28. For this is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

29. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.

30. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives.

THE Tuesday of Passion Week was occupied by the wonderful discourses which have furnished so many of our recent lessons. At its close Jesus sought

retirement in Bethany, not only to soothe and prepare His spirit, but to “hide Himself” from the Sanhedrin. There He spent the Wednesday. Who can imagine His thoughts? While He was calmly reposing in Mary’s quiet home, the rulers determined on His arrest, but were at a loss how to effect it without a riot. Judas comes to them opportunely, and they leave him to give the signal. Possibly we may account for the peculiar secrecy observed as to the place for the Last Supper by our Lord’s knowledge that His steps were watched, and by His earnest wish to eat the Passover with the disciples before He suffered. The change between the courting of publicity and almost inviting of arrest at the beginning of the week, and the evident desire to postpone the crisis till the fitting moment which marks the close of it, is remarkable, and most naturally explained by the supposition that He wished the time of His death to be that very hour when, according to law, the Paschal Lamb was slain. On the Thursday, then, He sent Peter and John into the city to prepare the Passover; the others being in ignorance of the place till they were there, and Judas being thus prevented from carrying out his purpose till after the celebration.

The precautions taken to ensure this have left their mark on Matthew’s narrative in the peculiar designation of the host,—“such a man!” It is a kind of echo of the mystery which he so well remembered as round the errand of the two. He does not seem to have known of the token by which they knew the house—the man with the pitcher, whom they were to meet. But he does know that Peter and John got secret instructions, and that he and the others wondered where they were to

go. Had there been a previous arrangement with this unnamed "such an one," or were the token and the message alike instances of Christ's supernatural knowledge and authority? It is difficult to say. I incline to the former supposition, which would be in accordance with the distinct effort after secrecy which marks these days; but the narratives do not decide the question. At all events, the host was a disciple, as appears from the authoritative "the Master saith"; and, whether He had known beforehand that "this day" incarnate "Salvation would come to his house," or no, he eagerly accepts the peril and the honour. The message is royal in its tone. The Lord does not ask permission, but issues His commands. But He is a pauper King, not having where to lay His head, and needing another man's house to gather His own household together for the family feast of the Passover. What profound truths are wrapped up in that "My time is come"! It speaks of the voluntariness of His surrender, the consciousness that His cross was the centre point of His work, His superiority to all external influences as determining the hour of His death, and His submission to the supreme appointment of the Father. Obedience and freedom, choice and necessity, are wonderfully blended in it.

So, late on that Thursday evening the little band left Bethany for the last time in a fashion very unlike the joyous stir of the triumphal entry. As the evening is falling they thread their way through the noisy streets, all astir with the festal crowds, and reach the upper room, Judas vainly watching for an opportunity to slip away on his black errand. The chamber, prepared by unknown hands, has vanished, and they are dust; but both are

immortal. How many of the living acts of His servants in like manner seem to perish, and the doers of them to be forgotten or unknown ! But He knows the name of "such an one," and does not forget that he opened his door for Him to enter in and sup.

Matthew's account of the designation of the traitor is less complete than John's, but it is not my province to harmonise the two. We may note the two points,—the tremulous question of self-distrusting love, with the merciful answer ; and the unabashed question of hardened treachery, with the stern, brief reply.

The form of the disciples' question in the Greek presupposes a negative answer, and might be represented by the colloquial "Surely it cannot be I ?" But yet it is a question ; and each man, looking into his own heart, though he found nothing there that savoured of unfaithfulness, felt that terrible possibilities of treason lay coiled and sleeping in the depths. Every man is a mystery to himself ; and he who has learned himself best, will be the readiest to acknowledge that the material for any sin is stored within, and may be set ablaze by some flash from hell. Vesuvius was quiet for centuries, and trees grew and cattle fed in the crater. Who knows what combustibles lie inert in the caves of his own heart ? Therefore, when we hear of terrible shipwrecks of faith and purity our wisest thought is, "Is it I ?" Christ's answer is mercifully sparing. He does not tell who the betrayer is, but only that he "dipped with Him in the dish," thus adding little to His previous words. More than one hand had been beside His as they dipped their morsels, and it would not be known which had been ; but Judas would know that his had. Christ here seems

to be making a last appeal, reminding him of the close intimacy of years, as well as of the touch of their hands a moment since. The token sets the treason in its full hideousness before the traitor, while it screens him from the others. Even at that supreme moment no anger flushes Christ's cheek, nor does He dwell on His own sorrows, but calmly speaks of His death as a change of place, and bows obedient to the divine decree which He has come to fulfil. With one brief glance at Himself, He passes on to pour out His pity and lamentation over the traitor, who, in contriving harm to his Lord, was ruining himself. The heart-piercing woe is not denunciation, but a last effort to rescue Judas by setting before him the awful fate he was pulling down on his own head, and showing him the compassion that filled Christ's heart. The effort was vain, and so the dreadful words became the epitaph of the living man who heard them unmoved.

His question must have taken some self-command before his quivering lips could shape it. He boldly repeats the "Surely it is not I," but he falters when he comes to "Lord," and cannot get farther than "Rabbi," as, indeed, he never did in speaking to Jesus. He betrays himself by his questions before he betrays his Lord. Unabashed hypocrisy may imitate the voice of true and tremulous love, but it does so with a difference appreciable to a delicate ear. It cannot call Him "Lord" while it meditates treason. There is a world of sadness, of baffled efforts, and of hopeless withdrawal, in Christ's brief and, as it would appear, whispered answer, "Thou hast said." Such a question was, in the sight of Him who reads the heart, an avowal; and, as such, marked

a further stage in obstinate resolve, since it was Judas's "answer" to Christ's appeal. When Christ reveals us to ourselves, and pleads with us to forsake our evil, our disclaimers are interpreted by Him as confessions, but such confessions as exclude the hope of repentance, and force even His pitying love to withdraw itself.

Apparently the meal had been interrupted by these events ; and, possibly, Judas at this point left the company. Be that as it may, Matthew seems to put verses 21-25 in a parenthesis, by his resumption of the phrase, "as they were eating," by which he passes to the institution of the Lord's Supper.

The fact that Jesus put aside the Passover and founded the Lord's Supper in its place, tells much both about His authority and its meaning. What must He have conceived of Himself who bade Jew and Gentile turn away from that God-appointed festival, and think not of Moses, but of Him? What did He mean by setting the Lord's Supper in the place of the Passover, if He did not mean that He was the true Paschal Lamb ; that His death was a true sacrifice ; that in His sprinkled blood was safety ; that His death inaugurated the better deliverance of the true Israel from a darker prison-house and a sorer bondage ; that His followers were a family, and that the children's bread was the sacrifice He had made ? There are many reasons for the doubling of the commemorative emblem, but this is obviously one of the chief,—that, by the separation of the two in the rite we are carried back to the separation in fact ; that is to say, the violent death of Christ. Not His flesh alone, in the sense of incarnation, but His body broken and His blood shed, are what He wills should be for

ever remembered. His own estimate of the central point of His work is unmistakably pronounced in His institution of this rite.

But we may consider the force of each emblem separately. In many important points they mean the same things, but they have each their own significance as well. Matthew's condensed version of the words of institution omits all reference to the breaking of the body and to the memorial character of the observance; but both are implied. He emphasises the reception, the participation, and the significance, of the bread. As to the latter, "This is My body," is to be understood in the same way as "the field is the world," and many other sayings. To speak in the language of grammarians, the copula is that of symbolic relationship, not that of existence; or, to speak in the language of the street, "is" here means, as it often does, "represent." How could it mean anything else when Christ sat there in His body, and His blood was in His veins? What, then, is the teaching of this symbol? It is not merely that He in His humanity is the bread of life, but that He in His death is the nourishment of our true life. In that great discourse in John's Gospel, which embodies in words the lessons which the Lord's Supper teaches by symbols, He advances from the general statement, "I am the bread of life" to the yet more mysterious and profound teaching that His flesh, which at some then future point He will give for the life of the world, is the bread; thus distinctly foreshadowing His death, and asserting that by that death we live, and by partaking of it are nourished. The participation in the benefits of Christ's death, which is symbolised by "Take, eat,"

is effected by living faith. We feed on Christ when our minds are occupied with His truth, our hearts nourished by His love, when it is the meat of our wills to do His will, and when our whole inward man fastens on Him as its true object, and draws from Him its best being. But the act of reception teaches the great lesson that Christ must be in us, if He is to do us any good. He is not "for us" in any real sense, unless He be "in us." The word rendered in John's Gospel "eateth" is that used for the ruminating of cattle, and wonderfully indicates the calm, continual, patient meditation, by which alone we can receive Christ into our hearts, and nourish our lives on Him. Bread eaten is assimilated to the body, but this bread eaten assimilates the eater to itself, and he who feeds on Christ becomes Christ-like, as the silkworm takes the hue of the leaves on which it browses. Bread eaten to-day will not nourish to-morrow, neither will past experiences of Christ's sweetness sustain the soul. He must be "our daily bread" if we are not to pine with hunger.

The wine carries its own special teaching, which clearly appears in Matthew's version of the words of institution. It is "My blood," representing that violent death by the other of the parts into which the living unity was separated. It is "covenant blood," the seal of that better covenant than the old, which God makes now with all mankind, wherein are given renewed hearts which carry the divine law within themselves; the reciprocal and mutually blessed possession of God by men and of men by God, the universally diffused knowledge of God, which is more than head knowledge, being the consciousness of possessing Him; and, finally,

the oblivion of all sins. These promises are fulfilled, and the covenant made sure, by the shed blood of Christ. So, finally, it is “shed for many, for the remission of sins.” The end of Christ’s death is pardon, which can only be extended on the ground of His death. We are told that Christ did not teach the doctrine of atonement. Did He establish the Lord’s Supper? If He did (and nobody denies that), what did He mean by it if He did not mean the setting forth by symbol of the very same truth which stated in words, is the doctrine of His atoning death? This rite does not indeed, explain the *rationale* of the doctrine; but it is a piece of unmeaning mummary, unless it preaches plainly the fact that Christ’s death is the ground of our forgiveness.

Bread is the staff of life, but blood is the life. So “this cup” teaches that the life of Jesus Christ must pass into His people’s veins, and that the secret of the Christian life is “I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” Wine is joy, and the Christian life is not only to be a feeding of the soul on Christ as the nourishment, but a glad partaking, as at a feast, of His life, and therein of His joy. Gladness of heart is a Christian duty, “the joy of the Lord is your strength,” and should be your joy; and though here we eat with loins girt, and go out, some of us to deny, some of us to flee, all of us to toil and suffer, yet we may have His joy fulfilled in ourselves, even whilst we sorrow.

The Lord’s Supper is predominantly a memorial, but it is also a prophecy, and is marked as such by the mysterious last words of Jesus, about drinking the new wine in the Father’s kingdom. They point the thoughts

of the saddened eleven, on whom the dark shadow of parting lay heavily, on to an eternal reunion, in a land where “all things are become new,” and where the festal cup shall be filled with a draught that has power to gladden and to inspire beyond any experience here. The joys of heaven shall be so far analogous to the Christian joys of earth that the same name may be applied to both ; but they shall be so unlike that the old name will need a new meaning, and communion with Christ at His table in His kingdom, and our exuberance of joy in the full drinking in of His immortal life, will transcend the selectest hours of communion here. Compared with that fulness of joy they will be “as water unto wine,”—the new wine of the kingdom.

LESSON XLIV.

Gethsemane, the Oil-Press.

MATTHEW xxvi. 36-46.

36. Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.

37. And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy.

38. Then saith He unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.

39. And He went a little farther, and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.

40. And He cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with Me one hour?

41. Watch and pray, that ye

enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

42. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O My Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done.

43. And He came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy.

44. And He left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

45. Then cometh He to His disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

46. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray Me.

ONE shrinks from touching this incomparable picture of unexampled sorrow, for fear lest one's finger-marks should stain it. There is no place here for picturesque description, which tries to mend the gospel

stories by dressing them in to-day's fashions, nor for theological systematisers and analysers of the sort that would "botanise upon their mother's grave." We must put off our shoes, and feel that we stand on holy ground. Though loving eyes saw something of Christ's agony, He did not let them come beside Him, but withdrew into the shadow of the gnarled olives, as if even the moonbeams must not look too closely on the mystery of such grief. We may go as near as love was allowed to go, but stop where it was stayed, while we reverently and adoringly listen to what the evangelist tells us of that unspeakable hour.

I. Mark the "exceeding sorrow" of the Man of Sorrows. Somewhere on the western foot of Olivet lay the garden, named from an oil-press formerly or then in it, which was to be the scene of the holiest and sorest sorrow on which the moon, that has seen so much misery, has ever looked. Truly it was "an oil-press," in which "the good olive" was crushed by the grip of unparalleled agony, and yielded precious oil, which has been poured into many a wound since then. Eight of the eleven are left at or near the entrance, while He passes deeper into the shadows with the three. They had been witnesses of His prayers once before, on the slopes of Hermon, when He was transfigured before them. They are now to see a no less wonderful revelation of His glory in His filial submission. There is something remarkable in Matthew's expression, "He began to be sorrowful,"—as if a sudden wave of emotion, breaking over His soul, had swept His human sensibilities before it. The strange word translated by the Revisers "sore troubled" is of uncertain derivation, and may possibly be simply intended to

intensify the idea of sorrow ; but more probably it adds another element, which Bishop Lightfoot describes as “the confused, restless, half-distracted state which is produced by physical derangement or mental distress.” A storm of agitation and bewilderment broke His calm, and forced from His patient lips, little wont to speak of His own emotions, or to seek for sympathy, the unutterably pathetic cry, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful”— compassed about with sorrow, as the word means—“even unto death.” No feeble explanation of these words does justice to the abyss of woe into which they let us dimly look. They tell a fact, that, a little more, and the body would have sunk under the burden. He knew the limits of human endurance, for “all things were made by Him,” and, knowing it, He saw that He had grazed the very edge. Out of the darkness He reaches a hand to feel for the grasp of a friend, and pitifully asks these humble lovers to stay beside Him, not that they could help Him to bear the weight, but that their presence had some solace in it. His agony must be endured alone, therefore He bade them tarry there ; but He wanted to have them at hand, therefore He went but “a little forward.” They could not bear it with Him, but they could “watch with” Him, and that poor comfort is all He asks. No word came from them. They were, no doubt, awed into silence, as the truest sympathy is used to be, in the presence of a great grief. Is it permitted us to ask what were the fountains of these bitter floods that swept over Christ’s sinless soul ? Was the mere physical shrinking from death all ? If so, we may reverently say that many a maiden and old man, who drew all their fortitude from Jesus, have gone to stake or gibbet for His sake, with a

calm which contrasts strangely with His agitation. Gethsemane is robbed of its pathos and nobleness if that be all. But it was not all. Rather it was the least bitter of the components of the cup. What lay before Him was not merely death, but the death which was to atone for a world's sin, and in which, therefore, the whole weight of sin's consequences was concentrated. "The Lord hath made to meet on Him the iniquities of us all." That is the one sufficient explanation of this infinitely solemn and tender scene. Unless we believe that, we shall find it hard to reconcile His agitation in Gethsemane with the perfection of His character as the Captain of "the noble army of martyrs."

II. Note the prayer of filial submission. Matthew does not tell us of the sweat falling audibly and heavily, and sounding to the three like slow blood-drops from a wound, nor of the strengthening angel; but He gives us the prostrate form, and the threefold prayer, renewed as each moment of calm, won by it, was again broken in upon by a fresh wave of emotion. Thrice He had to leave the disciples, and came back, a calm Conqueror; but twice the enemy rallied, and returned to the assault, but was at last driven finally from the field by the power of prayer and submission. The three synoptics differ in their report of our Lord's words, but all mean the same thing in substance; and it is obvious that much more must have been spoken than they report. Possibly what we have is only the fragments that reached the three before they fell asleep. In any case, Jesus was absent from them on each occasion long enough to allow of their doing so.

Three elements are distinguishable in our Lord's

prayer. There is, first, the sense of sonship, which underlies all, and was never more clear than at that awful moment. Then there is the recoil from the cup, which natural instinct could not but feel, though sinlessly. The flesh shrank from the cross, which else had been no suffering ; and if no suffering, then had been no atonement. His manhood would not have been like ours, nor His sorrows our pattern, if He had not thus drawn back, in His sensitive humanity, from the awful prospect now so near. But natural instinct is one thing, and the controlling will another. However currents may have tossed the vessel, the firm hand at the helm never suffered them to change her course. The will, which in this prayer He seems so strangely to separate from the Father's, even in the act of submission, was the will which wishes, not that which resolves. His fixed purpose to die for the world's sin never wavered. The shrinking does not reach the point of absolutely and unconditionally asking that the cup might pass. Even in the act of uttering the wish it is limited by that "if it be possible," which can only mean—possible, in view of the great purpose for which He came. That is to be accomplished, at any cost ; and unless it can be accomplished, though the cup be withdrawn, He does not even wish, much less will, that it should be withdrawn. So, the third element in the prayer is the utter resignation to the Father's will, in which submission He found peace, as we do.

He prayed His way to perfect calm, which is ever the companion of perfect self-surrender to God. They who cease from their own works do enter into rest. All the agitations which had come storming in massed battalions against Him are defeated by it. They have failed to

shake His purpose ; they now fail even to disturb His peace. So, victorious from the dreadful conflict, and at leisure of heart to care for others, He can go back to the disciples. But even whilst seeking to help them, a fresh wave of suffering breaks in on His calm, and once again He leaves them to renew the struggle. The instinctive shrinking reasserts itself, and, though overcome, is not eradicated. But the second prayer is yet more rooted in acquiescence than the first. It shows that He had not lost what He had won by the former ; for it, as it were, builds on that first supplication, and accepts as answer to its contingent petition the consciousness, accompanying the calm, that it was not possible for the cup to pass from Him. The sense of sonship underlies the complete resignation of the second prayer as of the first. It has no wish but God's will, and is the voluntary offering of Himself. Here He is both Priest and Sacrifice, and presents the Victim with this prayer of consecration. So once more He triumphs, because once more, and yet more completely, He submits, and accepts the cross. For Him, as for us, the cross accepted ceases to be a pain, and the cup is no more bitter when we are content to drink it. Once more in fainter fashion the enemy came on, casting again his spent arrows, and beaten back by the same weapon. The words were the same, because no others could have expressed more perfectly the submission which was the heart of His prayers and the condition of His victory.

Christ's prayer, then, was not for the passing of the cup, but that the will of God might be done in and by Him, and "He was heard in that He feared," not by being exempted from the cross, but by being strength-

ened through submission for submission. So His agony is the pattern of all true prayer, which must ever deal with our wishes, as He did with His instinctive shrinking,—present them wrapped in an “if it be possible,” and followed by that “nevertheless.” The meaning of prayer is not to force our wills on God’s, but to bend our wills to His; and that prayer is really answered of which the issue is our calm readiness for all that He lays upon us.

III. Note the sad and gentle remonstrance with the drowsy three. “The sleep of the disciples, and of these disciples, and of all three, and such an overpowering sleep, remains even after Luke’s explanation, ‘for sorrow,’ a psychological riddle” (Meyer). It is singularly parallel with the sleep of the same three at the transfiguration,—an event which presents the opposite pole of our Lord’s experiences, and yields so many antithetical parallels to Gethsemane. No doubt the tension of emotion, which had lasted for many hours, had worn them out; but, if weariness had weighed down their eyelids, love should have kept them open. Such sleep of such disciples may have been a riddle, but it was also a crime, and augured imperfect sympathy. Gentle surprise and the pain of disappointed love are audible in the question addressed to Peter especially, as he had promised so much, but meant for all. This was all that Jesus got in answer to His yearning for sympathy. “I looked for some to take pity, but there was none.” Those who loved Him most lay curled in dead slumber within earshot of His prayers. If ever a soul tasted the desolation of utter loneliness, that suppliant beneath the olives was He. But how little of the pain escapes His lips! The words but hint at the slightness of their task compared with His, at the

brevity of the strain on their love, and at the companionship which ought to have made sleep impossible. May we not see in Christ's remonstrance a word for all? For us, too, the task of keeping awake in the enchanted ground is light measured against His, and the time is short, and we have Him to keep us company in the watch, and every motive of grateful love should make it easy; and, alas, how many of us sleep a drugged and heavy slumber!

The gentle remonstrance soon passes over into counsel as gentle. Watchfulness and prayer are inseparable. The one discerns dangers; the other arms against them. Watchfulness keeps us prayerful, and prayerfulness keeps us watchful. To watch without praying is presumption; to pray without watching is hypocrisy. The eye that sees clearly the facts of life will turn upwards from its scanning of the snares and traps, and will not look in vain. These two are the indispensable conditions of victorious encountering of temptation. Fortified by them, we shall not "enter into" it, though we pass through it. The outward trial will remain, but its power to lead us astray will vanish. It will still be danger or sorrow, but it will not be temptation; and we shall pass through it, as a sunbeam through foul air, untainted, and keeping heaven's radiance. That is a lesson for a wider circle than the sleepy three.

It is followed by words which would need a volume to expound in all their depth and width of application, but which are primarily a reason for the preceding counsel, as well as a loving apology for the disciples' sleep. Christ is always glad to give us credit for even imperfect good; His eye, which sees deeper than ours, sees more

lovingly, and is not hindered from marking the willing spirit by the weak flesh. But these words are not to be made a pillow for indolent acquiescence in the limitations which the flesh imposes on the spirit. He may take merciful count of these, and so may we, in judging others; but it is fatal to plead them at the bar of our own consciences. Rather they should be a spur to our watchfulness and to our prayer. We need these because the flesh is weak; still more because, in its weakness toward good, it is strong to evil. Such exercise will give governing power to the spirit, and enable it to impose its will on the reluctant flesh. If we watch and pray, the conflict between these two elements in the renewed nature will tend to unity and peace by the supremacy of the spirit; if we do not, it will tend to cease by the unquestioned tyranny of the flesh. In one or other direction our lives are tending.

Strange that such words had no effect. But so it was, and so deep was the apostles' sleep that Christ left them undisturbed the second time. The relapse is worse than the original disease. Sleep broken and resumed is more torpid and fatal than if it had not been interrupted. We do not know how long it lasted, though the whole period in the garden must have been measured by hours; but at last it was broken by the enigmatical last words of our Lord. The explanation of the direct opposition between the consecutive sentences, by taking the "Sleep on now" as ironical, jars on one's reverence. Surely irony is out of keeping with the spirit of Christ then. Rather He bids them sleep on, since the hour is come, in sad recognition that the need for their watchful sympathy is past, and with it the opportunity for their

proved affection. It is said with a tone of contemplative melancholy, and is almost equivalent to "too late, too late." The memorable sermon of F. W. Robertson on this text rightly grasps the spirit of the first clause, when it dwells with such power on the thought of "the irrevocable past" of wasted opportunities and neglected duty. But the sudden transition to the sharp, short command and broken sentences of the last verse is to be accounted for by the sudden appearance of the flashing lights of the band led by Judas, somewhere near at hand, in the valley. The mood of pensive reflection gives place to rapid decision. He summons them to arise, not for flight, but that He may go out to meet the traitor. Escape would have been easy. There was time to reach some sheltering fold of the hill in the darkness; but the prayer beneath the silver-grey olives had not been in vain, and these last words in Gethsemane throb with the willingness to yield Himself up, and to empty to its dregs the cup which the Father had given Him.

LESSON XLV.

The Crucifixion.

MATTHEW xxvii. 33-50.

33. And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull,

34. They gave Him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when He had tasted thereof, He would not drink

35. And they crucified Him, and parted His garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted My garments among them, and upon My vesture did they cast lots.

36. And sitting down they watched Him there;

37. And set up over His head His accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

38. Then were there two thieves crucified with Him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.

39. And they that passed by reviled Him, wagging their heads,

40. And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and build-

est it in three days, save Thyself. If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

41. Likewise also the chief priests mocking Him, with the scribes and elders, said,

42. He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.

43. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him: for He said, I am the Son of God.

44. The thieves also, which were crucified with Him, cast the same in His teeth.

45. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.

46. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACH-THANI? that is to say, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?

47. Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias.

48. And straightway one of

them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave Him to drink.

49. The rest said, Let be, let

us see whether Elias will come to save Him.

50. Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.

THE characteristic of Matthew's account of the crucifixion is its representation of Jesus as perfectly passive and silent. His refusal of the drugged wine, His cry of desolation, and His other cry at death, are all His recorded acts. The impression of the whole is "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth." We are bid to look on the grim details of the infliction of the terrible death, and to listen to the mockeries of people and priests ; but reverent awe forbids description of Him who hung there in His long, silent agony. Would that like reticence had checked the ill-timed eloquence of preachers and teachers of later days !

I. We have the ghastly details of the crucifixion. Captain Conder's suggestion of the site of Calvary as a little knoll outside the city seems probable. It is now a low, bare hillock, with a scanty skin of vegetation over the rock, and in its rounded shape and bony rockiness explains why it was called "skull." It stands close by the main Damascus road, so that there would be many "passers-by" on that feast day. Its top commands a view over the walls into the temple enclosure, where, at the very hour of the death of Jesus, the Passover lamb was perhaps being slain. Arrived at the place, the executioners go about their task with stolid precision. What was the crucifying of another Jew or two to them ? Before they lift the cross, or fasten their Prisoner to it, a little touch of pity, or perhaps only the observance of

the usual custom, leads them to offer a draught of wine, in which some anodyne had been mixed to deaden pain. But the cup which He had to drink needed that He should be in full possession of all His sensibilities to pain, and of all His unclouded firmness of resolve ; and so His patient lips closed against the offered mercy. He would not drink because He would suffer, and He would suffer because He would redeem. His last act before He was nailed to the cross was an act of voluntary refusal of an opened door of escape from some portion of His pains.

What a gap there is between verses 34 and 35 ! The unconcerned soldiers went on to the next step in their ordinary routine on such an occasion,—the fixing of the cross and fastening of the Victim to it. To them it was only what they had often done before ; to Matthew it was too sacred to be narrated. He cannot bring his pen to write it. As it were, he bids us turn away our eyes for a moment ; and when next we look the deed is done, and there stands the cross, and the Lord hanging, dumb and unresisting, on it. We see not Him, but the soldiers, busy at their next task. So little were they touched by compassion or awe, that they pay no heed to Him, and suspend their work to make sure of their perquisites—the poor robes which they stripped from His body. Thus gently Matthew hints at the ignominy of exposure attendant on crucifixion, and gives the measure of the hard stolidity of the guards. Gain had been their first thought, comfort was their second. They were a little tired with their march and their work, and they had to stop there on guard for an indefinite time, with nothing to do but two more prisoners to crucify ; so they take a

rest, and idly keep watch over Him till He shall die. How possible it is to look at Christ's sufferings, and see nothing! These rude legionaries gazed for hours on what has touched the world ever since, and what angels desired to look into, and saw nothing but a dying Jew. They thought about the worth of the clothes, or about how long they would have to stop there, and in the presence of the most stupendous fact in the world's history were all unmoved. We too may gaze on the cross, and see nothing. We too may look at it without emotion, because without faith, or any consciousness of what it may mean for us. Only they who see there the sacrifice for their sins and the world's, see what is there. Others are as blind as, and less excusable than, these soldiers who watched all day by the cross, seeing nothing, and tramped back at night to their barrack, utterly ignorant of what they had been doing. But their work was not quite done. There was still a piece of grim mockery to be performed, which they would much enjoy. The "cause," as Matthew calls it, had to be nailed to the upper part of the cross. It was tri-lingual, as John tells us,—in Hebrew, the language of revelation; in Greek, the tongue of philosophy and art; in Latin, the speech of law and power. The three chief forces of the human spirit gave unconscious witness to the King; the three chief languages of the western World proclaimed His universal monarchy, even while they seemed to limit it to one nation. It was meant as a gibe at Him and at the nation, and as Pilate's statement of the reason for his sentence; but it meant more than Pilate meant by it, and it was fitting that His royal title should hang above His head, for the cross is His throne, and He is

the King of men, because He has died for them all. One more piece of work the soldiers had still to do. The crucifixion of the two robbers (perhaps of Barabbas's gang, though less fortunate than he) by Christ's side was intended to associate Him, in the public mind, with them and their crimes, and was the last stroke of malice, as if saying, "Here is your King, and here are two of His subjects and ministers." Matthew says nothing of the triumph of Christ's love, which won the poor robber for a disciple even at that hour of ignominy. His one purpose seems to be to accumulate the tokens of suffering and shame, and so to emphasise the silent endurance of the meek Lamb of God. Therefore, without a word about any of our Lord's acts or utterances, he passes on to the next group of incidents.

II. The mockeries of people and priests. There would be many coming and going on the adjoining road, most of them too busy about their own affairs to stop long; for crucifixion was a slow process, and, when once the cross was lifted, there was little to see. But they were not too busy to spit venom at Him as they passed. How many of these scoffers, to whom death cast no shield round the object of their poor taunts, had shouted themselves hoarse on the Monday, and waved palm branches that were not withered yet! What had made the change? There was no change. They were running with the stream in both their hosannas and their jeers, and the one were worth as much as the other. They had been tutored to cry, "Blessed is He that cometh!" and now they were tutored to repeat what had been said at the trial about destroying the temple. The worshippers of success are true to themselves when they mock at failure.

They who shout round Jesus, when other people are doing it, are only consistent when they join in the roar of execration. Let us take care that our worship of Him is rooted in our own personal experience, and independent of what rulers or influential minds may say of Him.

A common passion levels all distinctions of culture and rank. The reverend dignitaries echoed the ferocious ridicule of the mob, whom they despised so much. The poorest criminal would have been left to die in peace ; but brutal laughter surged round the silent Sufferer, and showers of barbed sarcasms were flung at Him. The throwers fancied them bitter jests and demonstrations of the absurdity of Christ's claims ; but they were really witnesses to His claims, and explanations of His sufferings. Look at them in turn with this thought in our minds. "He saved others ; Himself He cannot save," was launched as a sarcasm which confuted His alleged miracles by His present helplessness. How much it admits, even while it denies ! Then, He did work miracles ; and they were all for others, never for His own ends ; and they were all for saving, never for destroying. Then, too, by this very taunt His claim to be the "Saviour" is presupposed. And so "Physician, heal Thyself," seemed to them an unanswerable missile to fling. If they had only known what made the "cannot," and seen that it was a "will not," they would have stood full in front of the great miracle of love which was before them unsuspected, and would have learned that the not saving Himself, which they thought blew to atoms His pretensions to save others, was really the condition of His saving a world. If He is to save others, He cannot

save Himself. That is the law for all mutual help. The lamp burns out in giving light, but the necessity for the death of Him who is the Life of the world is founded on a deeper "must." His only way of delivering us from the burden of sin is taking it on Himself. He has to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows, if He is to bear away the sin of the world. But the "cannot" derives all its power from His own loving will. The rulers' taunt was a venomous lie, as they meant it. If for "cannot" we read "will not," it is the central truth of the gospel.

Nor did they succeed better with their second gibe, which made mirth of such a throne, and promised allegiance if He would come down. O blind leaders of the blind ! that death which seemed to them to shatter His royalty really established it. His cross is His throne of saving power, by which He sways hearts and wills, and because of it He receives from the Father universal dominion, and every knee shall bow to Him. It is just because He did not come down from it that we believe on Him. On His head are many crowns ; but, however many they be, they all grow out of the crown of thorns. The true kingship is absolute command over willingly submitted spirits ; and it is His death which bows us before Him in raptures of glad love ; which counts submission, liberty, and sacrifice blessed. He has the right to command because He has given Himself for us, and His death wakes all-surrendering and all-expecting faith.

Nor was the third taunt more fortunate. These very religious men had read their Bibles so badly that they might never have heard of Job, nor of the latter half of Isaiah. They had been poring over the letter all their lives, and had never seen, with their microscopes, the

great figure of the innocent Sufferer, so plain there. So they thought that the cross demonstrated the hollowness of Christ's trust in God, and the rejection of Him by God. Surely religious teachers should have been slow to scoff at religious trust, and surely they might have known that failure and disaster even to death were no signs of God's displeasure. But, in one aspect, they were right. It is a mystery that such a life should end thus ; and the mystery is none the less because many another less holy life has ended in suffering too. But the mystery is solved when we know that God did not deliver Him, just because He "would have Him," and that the Father's delight in the Son reached its very highest point when He became obedient until death, and offered Himself a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing unto God.

III. We pass on to the darkness, desolation, and death. Matthew represents these three long hours from noon till what answers to our 3 p.m. as passed in utter silence by Christ. What went on beneath that dread veil we are not meant to know. Nor do we need to ask its physical cause or extent. It wrapped the agony from cruel eyes ; it symbolised the blackness of desolation in His spirit, and by it God draped the heavens in mourning for man's sin. What were the onlookers doing then ? Did they cease their mocking, and feel some touch of awe creeping over them ?

"His brow was chill with dying,
And His soul was faint with loss."

The cry that broke the awful silence, and came out of the darkness, was more awful still. The fewer our words the better ; only we may mark how, even in this agony,

Jesus has recourse to prophetic words, and finds in a lesser sufferer's cry voice for His desolation. Further, we may reverently note the marvellous blending of trust and sense of desertion. He feels that God has left Him, and yet He holds on to God. His faith, as a man, reached its climax in that supreme hour when, loaded with the mysterious burden of God's abandonment, He yet cried in His agony "My God!" and that with reduplicated appeal. Separation from God is the true death, the wages of sin ; and in that dread hour He bore in His own consciousness the uttermost of its penalty. The physical fact of Christ's death, if it could have taken place without this desolation from the consciousness of separation from God, would not have been the bearing of all the consequences of man's sins. The two must never be parted in our grateful contemplations ; and, while we reverently abjure the attempt to pierce into that which God hid from us by the darkness, we must reverently ponder what Christ revealed to us by the cry that clefth it, witnessing that He then was indeed bearing the whole weight of a world's sin. By the side of such thoughts, and in the presence of such sorrow, the clumsy jest of the bystanders, which caught at the half-heard words, and pretended to think that Jesus was a crazy fanatic calling for Elijah with his fiery chariot to come and rescue Him, may well be passed by. One little touch of sympathy moistened His dying lips, not without opposition from the heartless crew who wanted to have their jest out. Then came the end. The loud cry of the dying Christ is worthy of record ; for crucifixion ordinarily killed by exhaustion, and this cry was evidence of abundant remaining vitality. In accordance

therewith, the fact of death is expressed by a phrase, which, though used for ordinary deaths, does yet naturally express the voluntariness of Christ. “He sent away His spirit,” as if He had bid it depart, and it obeyed. Whether the expression may be fairly pressed so far or no, the fact is the same, that Jesus died, not because He was crucified, but because He chose. He was the lord and master of Death ; and when He bid His armour-bearer strike, the slave struck, and the King died, not like Saul on the field of his defeat, but a victor in and by and over death.

LESSON XLVI.

The Prince of Life.

MATTHEW xxviii. 1-15.

1. In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

2. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

3. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

4. And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

5. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

6. He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

7. And go quickly, and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead; and, behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you.

8. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear

and great joy; and did run to bring His disciples word.

9. And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying. All hail. And they came and held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him.

10. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell My brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see Me.

11. Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and showed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.

12. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers.

13. Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept.

14. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.

15. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

THE attempts at harmonising the resurrection narratives are not only unsatisfactory, but they tend to blur the distinctive characteristics of each account. We

shall therefore confine ourselves entirely to Matthew's version, and leave the others alone, with the simple remark that a condensed report of a series of events does not deny what it omits, nor contradict a fuller one. The peculiarities of Matthew's last chapter are largely due to the purpose of his Gospel. Throughout it has been the record of the Galilean ministry, the picture of the King of Israel, and of His treatment by those who should have been His subjects. This chapter establishes the fact of His resurrection ; but, passing by the Jerusalem appearances of the risen Lord, as being granted to individuals, and having less bearing on His royalty, emphasises two points : His rejection by the representatives of the nation, whose lie is endorsed by popular acceptance ; and the solemn assumption, in the Galilee, so familiar to the reader, of universal dominion, with the world-wide commission, in which the kingdom bursts the narrow national limits and becomes co-extensive with humanity. It is better to learn the meaning of Matthew's selection of his incidents, than to wipe out instructive peculiarities in the vain attempt after harmony.

First, notice his silence (in which all the four narratives are alike) as to the time and circumstances of the resurrection itself. That had taken place before the grey twilight summoned the faithful women, and before the earthquake and the angel's descent. No eye saw Him rise. The guards were not asleep, for the statement that they were, is a lie put into their mouths by the rulers ; but though they kept jealous watch, His rising was invisible to them. "The prison was shut with all safety," for the stone was rolled away after He was risen, "and the keepers standing before the doors," but there

was "no man within." As in the evening of that day He appeared in the closed chamber, so He passed from the sealed grave. Divine decorum required that that transcendent act should be done without mortal observers of the actual rising of the Sun which scatters for ever the darkness of death.

Matthew next notices the angel ministrant and herald. His narrative leaves the impression that the earthquake and appearance of the angel immediately preceded the arrival of the women, and the "Behold!" suggests that they felt and saw both. But that is a piece of chronology on which there may be difference of opinion. The other narratives tell of two angels. Matthew's mention of one only may be due either to the fact that one was speaker, or to the subjective impressions of his informant, who saw but the one, or to variation in the number visible at different times. We know too little of the laws which determine their appearances to be warranted in finding contradiction or difficulty here. The power of seeing may depend on the condition of the beholder. It may depend, not as with gross material bodies, on optics, but on the volition of the radiant being seen. They may pass from visibility to its opposite, lightly and repeatedly, flickering into and out of sight, as the Pleiades. Where there is such store of possibilities, he is rash who talks glibly about contradictions. Of far more value is it to note the purpose served by this waiting angel. We heard much of a herald angel of the Lord in the story of the nativity. We hear nothing of him during the life of Christ. Now again he appears, as the stars, quenched in the noon tide, shine again when the sun is out of the sky. He attends as humble servitor in token that the

highest beings gazed on that empty grave with reverent adoration, and were honoured by being allowed to guard the sacred place. Death was an undreaded thing to them, and no hopes for themselves blossomed from Christ's grave ; but He who had lain in it was their King as well as ours, and new lessons of divine love were taught them, as they wondered and watched. They come to minister by act and word to the weeping women's faith and joy. Their appearance paralyses the guards, who would have kept the Marys from the grave. They roll away the great circular stone, which women's hands, however nerved by love, could not have moved in its grooves. They speak tender words to them. There by the empty tomb the strong heavenly and the weak earthly lovers of the risen King meet together, and clasp hands of help, the pledge and first-fruits of the standing order henceforth, and the inauguration of their office of " ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for . . . heirs of salvation." The risen Christ hath made both one. The servants of the same King must needs be friends of one another.

The angel's words fall into three parts. First, he calms fears by the assurance that the seekers for Christ are dear to Him. " Fear not ye " glances at the prostrate watchers, and almost acknowledges the reasonableness of their abject terror. To them he could not but be hostile, but to hearts that longed for their and his Lord, he and all his mighty fellows were brethren. Let us learn that all God's angels are our lovers and helpers, if we love and seek for Jesus. Superstition has peopled the gulf between God and man with crowds of beings ; revelation assures us that it is full of creatures who excel

in strength. Men have cowered before them, but "whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers," our King was their Creator, and is their Sovereign, and, if we serve Him, all these are on our side. The true Deliverer from superstitious terrors is the risen Christ. Again the angel announces in simplest words the glorious fact, "He is risen," and helps them to receive it by a double way. He reminds them of Christ's own words, which had seemed so mysterious and had turned out so simple, so incredible, and now had proved so true. He calls them with a smile of welcome to draw near, and with him to look into the empty place. The invitation extends to us all, for the one assurance of immortality; and the only answer to the despairing question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" which is solid enough to resist the corrosion of modern doubt as of ancient ignorance, is that empty grave and the filled throne, which was its necessary consequence. By it we measure the love that stooped so low; we school our hearts to anticipate our own lying down there without dread or reluctance; we fasten our faith on the risen Forerunner, and rejoice in the triumphant assurance of a living Christ. If the wonder of the women's stunned gaze is no more ours, the calm acceptance of the familiar fact need be none the less glad, and the estimate of its far-reaching results more complete than their tumult of feeling permitted to them.

No wonder that, swiftly, new duty which was privilege followed on the new, glad knowledge. It was emphatically "a day of good tidings," and they could not hold their peace. A brief glance, enough for certitude and

joy, was permitted ; and then, with urgent haste, they are sent to be apostles to the apostles. The possession of the news of a risen Saviour binds the possessors to be its preachers. Where it is received in any power, it will impel to utterance. He who can keep silence has never felt, as he ought, the worth of the word, nor realised the reason why he has seen the cross or the empty grave. "He goeth before you into Galilee ; there shall ye see." It was but two complete days and one night since Christ had said to the disciples that He would rise again, and, as the Shepherd of the scattered flock, go before them into Galilee. How long ago since that saying it would seem ! The reason for Matthew's omission of all the other appearances of our Lord in Jerusalem, with the exception of the one which immediately follows, and for the stress he lays on this rendezvous in their native Galilee, have already been touched on, and will come up again in the next chapter, and so need not detain us now.

The next point in our narrative is the glad interview with the risen Jesus. The women had been at the grave but for a few moments. But they lived more in these than in years of quiet. Time is very elastic, and five minutes or five seconds may change a life. These few moments changed a world. Haste, winged by fear which had no torment, and by joy which found relief in swift movement, sent them running, forgetful of conventional proprieties, towards the awakening city. Probably Mary Magdalene had left them, as soon as they saw the open grave, and had hurried back alone to tell the tidings. And now the crowning joy and wonder comes. How simply it is told !—the introductory "Behold," just

hinting at the wonderfulness, and perhaps at the suddenness, of our Lord's appearance, and the rest being in the quietest and fewest words possible. Note the deep significance of the name "Jesus" here. The angel spoke of "the Lord," but all the rest of the chapter speaks of "Jesus." The joy and hope that flowed from the resurrection depend on the fact of His humanity. He comes out of the grave, the same Brother of our mortal flesh as before. It was no phantom whose feet they clasped, and He is not withdrawn from them by His mysterious experience. All through the resurrection histories and the narrative of the forty days the same emphasis attaches to the name, which culminates in the angel's assurance at the ascension, that "this same Jesus," in His true humanity, who has gone up on high our Forerunner, shall come again, our Brother and our Judge. "It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again"; but that triumphant assurance loses all its blessedness, unless we say too, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and . . . rose again the third day." Note, too, the calmness of His greeting. He uses the common form of salutation, as if He had but been absent on some common occasion, and met them in ordinary circumstances. He speaks out of His own deep tranquillity, and desires to impart it to their agitated spirits. He would calm their joy, that it may be the deeper, like His own. If we may give any weight to the original meaning of the formula of greeting which He employs, we may see blessed prophecy in it. The lips of the risen Christ bid us all "rejoice." His salutation is no empty wish, but a command which makes its own fulfilment possible. If our hearts welcome Him, and

our faith is firm in His risen power and love, then He gives us a deep and central gladness, which nothing

"That is at enmity with joy
Can utterly abolish or destroy."

The rush to His feet, and the silent clasp of adoration, are eloquent of a tumult of feeling most natural, and yet not without turbid elements, which He does not wholly approve. We have not here the prohibition of such a touch which was spoken to Mary, but we have substantially the same substitution, by His command, of practical service for mere emotion. That carries a lesson always in season. We cannot love Christ too much, nor try to get too near Him, to touch Him with the hand of our faith. But there have been modes of religious emotion, represented by hymns and popular books, which have not mingled reverence rightly with love, and have spoken of Him, and of the emotions binding us to Him, in tones unwholesomely like those belonging to earthly passion. But, apart from that, Jesus taught these women, and us through them, that it is better to proclaim His rising than to lie at His feet; and that, however sweet the blessedness which we find in Him may be, it is meant to put a message into our lips which others need. Our sight of Him gives us something to say, and binds us to say it. It was a blessing to the women to have work to do, in which their strained emotions might come to repose. It was a blessing to the mournful company in the upper room, to have their hearts prepared for His coming by these heralds. It was a wonderful token of His unchanged love, and an answer to fears and doubts of how they might find Him, that He sends the message to them as brethren.

In the hurry of that Easter morning they had no time to ponder on all that it had brought them. The resurrection as the demonstration of Christ's divinity and of the acceptance of His perfect sacrifice, or as the pledge of our resurrection, or as the type of our Christian life, was for future experience to grasp. For that day it was enough to pass from despair to joy, and to let the astounding fact flood them with sunny hope.

We know the vast sweep of the consequences and consolations of it far better than they did. There is no reason in our distance from it, for its diminishing either in magnitude, in certitude, or in blessedness in our eyes. No fact in the history of the world stands on such firm evidence as the resurrection of Jesus Christ. No age of the world ever needed to believe it more than this one does. It becomes us all to grasp it for ourselves with an iron tenacity of hold, and to echo, in the face of the materialisms and know-nothing philosophy of this day, the old ringing confession, "Now is Christ risen from the dead."

We need say little about the last point in this lesson,—the obstinate blindness of the rulers, and their transparent lie to account for the empty grave. The guard reports to the rulers, not to the governor, as they had been handed over by Pilate for special service. But they were Roman soldiers, as appears from the danger which the rulers provided against, of their alleged crime against military discipline, in sleeping at their post, coming to his ears. The trumped-up story is too puerile to have taken in any one who did not wish to believe it. How could they tell what happened when they were asleep? How could such an operation as forcing back

a heavy stone, and exhuming a corpse, have been carried on without waking them? How could such a timid set of people have mustered up courage for such a bold act? What did they do it for? Not to bury their Lord. He had been lovingly laid there by reverent hands, and costly spices strewn upon the sacred limbs. The only possible motive would be that the disciples might tell lies about His resurrection. That hypothesis that the resurrection was a deliberately concocted falsehood has proved too strong for the stomach of modern unbelief, and has been long abandoned, as it had need to be. When figs grow on thistles, such characters as the early Christians, martyrs, heroes, saints, will be produced by a system which has a lie, known to be one, for its foundation. But the lame story is significant in two ways. It confesses, by its desperate attempt to turn the corner of the difficulty, that the great rock, on which all denials of Christ's resurrection split, is the simple question—If He did not rise again, what became of the body? The priests' answer is absurd, but it, at all events, acknowledges that the grave was empty, and that it is incumbent to produce an explanation which reasonable men can accept without laughter.

Further, this last appearance of the rulers in the Gospel is full of tragic significance, and is especially important to Matthew, whose narrative deals especially with Jesus as the King and Messiah of Israel. This is the end of centuries of prophecy and patience! This is what all God's culture of His vineyard has come to! The husbandmen cast the heir out of the vineyard, and slew him. There was a deeper depth than even that. They would not be persuaded when He rose again from the

dead. They entrenched themselves in a lie, which only showed that they had a glimmering of the truth and hated it. And the lie was willingly swallowed by the mass of the nation, who thereby showed that they were of the same stuff as they who made it. A conspiracy or falsehood, which knew itself to be such, was the last form of that august council of Israel. It is an awful lesson of the penalties of unfaithfulness to the light possessed, an awful instance of "judicial blindness." So sets the sun of Israel. And therefore our Gospel turns away from the apostate nation, which has rejected its King, to tell, in its last words, of His assumption of universal dominion, and of the passage of the glad news from Israel to the world.

LESSON XLVII.

“Crowned with Glory and Honour.”

MATTHEW xxviii. 16-20.

16. Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.

17. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him: but some doubted.

18. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.

19. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

WE have already seen that Matthew's plan led him to dwell on three points in his narrative of the resurrection and forty days; namely, the fact itself, the attitude of rulers and people to the risen King, and Christ's solemn assumption of universal dominion and appointment of His Church as His ambassadors to the world. The close connection of these points with the whole scheme of this Gospel does not need to be insisted on. Its main lines of thought reach their natural terminus in them; and the remarkable omissions of this account receive explanation, which, at all events, lightens, if it does not remove, the difficulties. Unquestionably, Matthew's version, taken alone and inter-

preted on the principle that it was meant to be complete, is full of startling gaps, and leaves the impression that the eleven never saw Jesus till Galilee, and never saw Him again. But how can a story be supposed to be complete which tells nothing of what happened between the resurrection morning and that day in Galilee, and which leaves Christ and the eleven up on the mountain, and has no word of what became of Him or them afterwards ; to say nothing of the obvious fact that it implies intercourse which it does not record, when it tells us that Jesus specified the spot in Galilee where they were to meet ? Clearly, then, the narrative before us is not complete, and does not assume to be. That is, it selects its incidents, and we think that the principle of selection, as already pointed out, is reasonable as well as obvious. If so, we need not disturb our study of what Matthew does tell by the question—Why did he not tell something else ?—nor be anxious to fit all the evangelists' accounts together, like a dissected map. If we had a fifth complete account, like a key to the map puzzle, which showed where each piece was to go, there would be some hope of success ; but, till we have, I am afraid we shall be like children with an obstinately awkward bit or two, that will not go in anywhere.

It is to be observed, too, that Matthew gives no details such as John and Luke have, bearing on the nature of our Lord's resurrection body, or on the manner of His intercourse with the disciples. All he cares for is to make plain the facts that He is risen, and that He is rejected by His people, and mounts the throne of the universe. One solemn audience the King gives to

His gathered disciples, in which He constitutes them His heralds to the whole world till the end of the ages, and casts round their feebleness the shield of His perpetual presence. Then the curtain falls. The last thing we see is that throned Christ, and, clustered about Him, His messengers. There is no need for the addition of the ascension. It was but the completion of the process begun by resurrection, and is necessarily included in it. It was implied in Christ's royal words, which Matthew does record ; for where could the seat of limitless authority over earth and heaven be but at God's right hand ? And it was implied no less in the promise of His perpetual presence ; for where could He be except "in the heavenly places," who was to be with every servant of His all through the wide space of the world and the long duration of "the age"? Our evangelist, then, presupposes and implies much more than he records ; and we are blind to the obvious intention and the bearings of what he tells, if we do not feel that his narrative is a selected and summary view of one aspect of the resurrection and of Christ's risen life.

What a difference in the intercourse of Jesus with His disciples is hinted at in the simple words which tell how the eleven "went into Galilee"! They had travelled the same road with Him more than once ; but now, though He is in Jerusalem, and is to meet them in Galilee, they go alone. One characteristic of the forty days is the withdrawal of Christ from all intimate association with them. He comes and goes, appears and disappears, is loving and gracious when with them, but no man ventures to follow Him, or to say, "Master,

tarry." The old days of unbroken companionship are over, only to be renewed in purer and yet truer communion, when He is beyond sight and touch. No doubt, the remoteness was a result of the state into which He had passed; but surely it was still more a tender accustoming them to do without the visible presence, so soon to be withdrawn from them. The half-fledged wings had to be tried. The upholding arm still circles the infant; but its actual contact is held back for a moment, that the tottering little feet may gain confidence and a faltering step or two may be taken. "It is expedient for you that I go away"; but He will not go all at once. The wise gardener does not withdraw the prop from the plant that has been accustomed to it but by degrees, as the stems get strength. So though He "goeth before them" as a shepherd "into Galilee," He gives them their first lesson in trusting an unseen guide. We, too, have to walk alone to the mountain where Jesus has appointed to meet us, and only to the eye of faith is the Shepherd with His flock.

From Matthew we should not gather that any but the eleven were present on the mountain; but the fact that "some doubted" seems to imply that some were there who saw Him then for the first time after the resurrection. Doubt would scarcely be possible to any of the apostles after their intercourse in Jerusalem. We lean to the supposition that this interview is that referred to by Paul as having been enjoyed by "five hundred brethren at once," as only in Galilee would it have been easy to gather so many disciples (in Jerusalem there were only one hundred and twenty), and the tone of Matthew's account suggests a previously arranged and

general convocation of believers for a public and solemn commission from the King. The eleven "went into Galilee"; but many of the five hundred would be there already, as their home, and probably others, who might have gone up to the Passover, would hasten back. Be that as it may, this interview is strikingly different in tone from those at Jerusalem. These were tender and close, like the communion of dear friends. Here is more of majesty and authority. With less of proximity they "see" Him, as if they were all assembled like courtiers waiting for the entrance of a monarch. Suddenly He becomes visible, approaching them. It is to be noted that the worship of the most and the doubts of a few took place as soon as He was seen, and before He had reached them. As for the prostrate adoration, we do not hear of it before the resurrection; and though the word does not necessarily mean adoration rendered to God, we cannot but suppose that something more than the reverence fitting to pay to any man moved them to fall on their faces as He came calmly to them. How different from their familiar companionship of old! As for the doubters, the fact that there were some is valuable as indicating, what is very plain throughout, that the disciples were not expectant nor credulous. "Some doubted." All had doubted at first. Modern "explanations" of the resurrection postulate the expectation of it by the disciples, and then go on learnedly to explain how hallucinations may spring from high-wrought anticipations; or, in plainer words, how people can easily persuade themselves that they have seen a dear one whom they wish to see. One wonders whether the ingenious authors of such explanations have ever lost the

light of their eyes, and longed with passionate longing for one glimpse of the vanished face. But all the evidence goes to show that the disciples had no expectation of any resurrection, and so that the soil in which hallucinations could grow was wanting. Strange hallucinations which laid hold of five hundred at once, and fancied such words as follow ! The disciples' doubts are no small part of the foundations of our certitude, and the frank record of them shows the transparent *bona fides* of the evangelist.

The royal proclamation, if we may so call it, which ends our Gospel, is in full accord with its prevailing idea. Throughout it is the gospel of the King ; and here He speaks kingly, as from the steps of the throne. His claim, command, and promise may be noted. The resurrection was the transition from the state of humiliation and limitation ; and by it Jesus enters, in His manhood, on the possession of that "glory which He had with the Father" from eternity. In these mighty words, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth," He stretches out the hand that had been pierced with the nails, and shows us that it holds the "unlimited sceptre which His Almighty Father has bequeathed Him." It had been His from everlasting, but now His humanity is crowned, and the resurrection is the first step in the glorification of the body of His humiliation. The Man Jesus rules the universe. Whatever unknown orders of being and forms of power may fill the heavens, He is their King. Whatever rebellious or unconscious forces may storm on earth, He controls them. There is no power but of God, and all God's power belongs to the Man who died and rose again. The kingdoms of

nature, of providence, of grace, and of glory, are His. Thus, deep and broad and firm He lays the foundations for our trust, peace, obedience, and hope. If all power be His, none can be against His friends. If He has all power, we need not fear, though we have all weakness.

But this sovereign proclamation appears here not only as the last thought of Himself, which He would stamp on His servants' hearts, but as the foundation of their great commission. The "therefore" of verse 19 is perhaps spurious; but if not text, it is correct commentary. Because Christ's dominion is boundless, His servants' message is for the world. The extent of the commission is the new thing here. It marks the widening of the conception of the kingdom from the Jewish to the universal form, not only in idea, but in practice. However long it took to bring out into clearness all the consequences of the fact, the Church knew its world-wide vocation from that hour. But what a lesson that collocation of Christ's authority and His servants' duty teaches as to the sort of sway He wills to wield over men. "Therefore conquer with the sword? Reap the world's riches? Make yourselves tyrants?" No; but "therefore make disciples." He wants men's minds and hearts. The knowledge of His truth is the condition of His real rule over us. He does not care for slaves, unwilling or unconscious subjects. He longs for disciples. His servants please Him best, and most advance His kingdom, which, though universal, is capable of advance, when they carry His name to the ends of the earth. His absolute power is the reason, not for their indolent quiescence, but for their strenuous

work. "Young man, if God wants to convert the heathen, He will do it without you," said the old minister to William Carey. But not so is the logic of the commission,—"All power is mine, therefore go ye."

I may be allowed to quote the recently published words of Mr. Beet, who is not a Baptist. "This (that is, the verse before us) does not mean, according to the more probable reading, that baptism was to be the method of making disciples, but simply that, while gathering learners for the school of Christ, the apostles were to baptise them, and also to teach them whatsoever Christ had commanded" (*British Weekly*, March 2nd, 1888, p. 330). I may further be allowed to point out that, unless the command means wholesale, indiscriminate baptism, such as was practised when the Saxons were "converted," it must necessarily mean selection; and the principle of selection could only be the profession of discipleship, whatever amount of moral or spiritual change that may have carried. The name into which the baptised are to be baptised, and the relation which they come into to it, as well as the further instruction in Christ's will of which they are to be the recipients, are elements which must fairly be taken into account in forming our opinion on the connection between baptism and discipleship.

The command to baptise into the name does not lay down a formula for the administrator, but declares the significance of baptism for the subject. He is brought into communion and vital union with the threefold manifested Godhead. The name is the revealed character

or nature.' The name of these three is one name. A Christian holds a living relation to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, of which relation his baptism is the sign. A strange name it would be if it were compounded of divinity, humanity, and an influence !

The baptised are to be taught obedience to all the will of the King. Note the tone of sovereign authority. His will is to be their law and their sole law. The whole Church, to the end of time and over all the world, is to be occupied in learning and obeying His commands. They need no other words but His for wisdom or for conduct ; and they are not to pick and choose among His words, but to take them all, for in them is no error nor anything fit for one period or race or stage of culture more than another.

The claim and the command lead up to the wonderful promise, which fitly closes the recorded words of the King. Matthew does not tell of the ascension, but that promise implies it. His going away is His coming to every waiting heart, and abiding with it. He can only be with all if His bodily presence be exchanged for the better presence in our hearts and by our sides. The command that sent His servants to toil, while He sat on his throne, might seem to divide conditions unequally. Soldiers murmur when the commander does not share their dangers, and march at their head. "Go ye" might seem hard, but "I am with you" sets all right. The Captain of our Salvation has not withdrawn to a safe height, leaving us to fight His battles ; but, as the first martyr saw Him, standing in attitude of eager sympathy and swift help, so He is with all His struggling servants, a presence nearer than all others, and never

withdrawn from the trustful heart. His name is Immanuel—God with us—till the end of the ages, when He will take us from toil to rest, and “so shall we ever be with the Lord,” who was “with us” while change and sorrow and conflict pressed us sore.

LESSON XLVIII.

Review Lesson Thoughts.

MATTHEW xiv.-xxi.

THESE lessons may be grouped round the thirtieth, which is not only their centre, but the culminating point of our Lord's earthly manifestation. The transfiguration is the revelation of the glory and the prophecy of tragedy of the King, both in their highest form. The lessons before it are a progressive revelation of the character of the King, three of them being symbolic miracles, with wide teaching in their mercy, and the last of them being, in Peter's confession, the summing up of what His followers had already learned of Him, and, in His prophecy of the cross, the new truth which they yet needed. Thus preceded by a group having mainly reference to the character and work of the King, the transfiguration is followed by another set of four lessons, bearing chiefly on the character of His subjects, and unveiling the laws of the kingdom, which may all be summed up in the one, of being like the King. These reach their climax in the presentation of His life of service and death of ransom as the Pattern for all His followers. Nothing can be added to such a requirement, and so the lessons pass on to the two closing ones, which set forth the two sides of men's rela-

tions to their Sovereign. In the one He is welcomed by humble hearts and children's voices, and shows Himself as meek and yet royal ; in the other He is rejected by the powerful and the cultivated classes, and foreshadows the destructive aspect of His power, which lies dormant now beside the meekness. Thus these two last lessons complete the picture, not only of the King, but of the double reception of His kingdom ; and remind us of Simeon's prophecy, spoken over the infant in His mother's arms, "This Child is set for the rise and fall of many in Israel."

With this general view of the connection of these lessons we may look at each again. The walking on the sea (Lesson XXVI.) has a triple value. As a historical fact, it signally sets forth His absolute control over the elements, and shows Him exercising, as natural to Him, the attributes of divinity. As a symbol, which it manifestly is, it teaches His knowledge, though absent, of His servants' struggles, His use of opposing forces as the pathway for His feet, His time of coming to our help, and the calm which ever attends our receiving Him into our hearts or our toils. It also gives, in the episode of Peter's sinking and rescue, a living illustration of the power of faith to uphold, and the certain collapse of ventures, even when prompted by love to Him, which are made in our own strength. The ship which carries Christ is safe. The trembling foot can tread on the waves as on a marble floor, if the hand grasps Him, or rather is grasped by Him.

The third miracle, of the healing of the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter (Lesson XXVII.), widens still farther the sweep of His empire, and shows us that He is King

of the deep and dark dominions of evil, however they may seem to have cast off allegiance. The very contrast between the unasked beneficence in other miracles and the apparent deafness to a desperate mother's piteous cry in this, brings into greater prominence the habitual readiness, by the solitary exception ; and the exception, which stimulates to inquiry as to its reason, turns out to be to the full as eloquent of His universal love as the normal deeds are. For the limitation of His mission, which compelled it, was no limitation of His sympathy, as is shown by the gladness with which He springs to meet and reward the faith which made the heathen woman a daughter of Abraham ; and the limitation of His mission was but for the time of His earthly life, and whilst it was in force, His heart went out to the other sheep, not of this fold.

Lesson XXIX., Peter's confession, marks an epoch in the unfolding of the character of the King and of His kingdom. On the one hand, it sums up the whole impression made on the disciples by the revelation thus far, in the acknowledgment "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." That was the irresistible inference from all that they had hitherto seen and known. To have and to hold fast that belief, as a living faith, makes any man a "Peter," a rock, on which Christ is able to rear some part of His Church. Whoever has it can open the gate of the kingdom, and lead men in to share in the blessedness of his own obedience to the King ; and every such man has authority and illumination from Him, to pronounce what things are permissible and what forbidden, within the realm. The recognition of Christ's Divine Sonship (of course, not as a mere

intellectual apprehension, but with the glad bowing down of the whole nature to His sway) lies at the foundation of just decisions as to moral questions. But this recognition needs a further truth, namely, that of the suffering Christ ; and that was new to Peter and the rest, and as distasteful as new. The King anointed and divinely sent was confessed, but the King suffering and dying was a stumbling-block. So Jesus takes the knowledge already won as the basis for this startling new thought ; and we may well learn that the conception of the King of Israel and of men lacks its consummation, unless it includes His death of sacrifice.

The transfiguration (Lesson XXX.) is closely connected with our Lord's prediction of His sufferings. Gloom and glory were ever side by side in His life, and it was fitting that the mysterious scene on Hermon should follow close upon the sad announcements at Cæsarea Philippi. The change in our Lord's appearance, from which the incident derives its popular name, was but a momentary making visible, even to the eye of sense, of the indwelling divinity. It was not the coronation of the King, but it was His assuming for a moment His royal robes. The second part of the incident, the appearance and colloquy of the sainted dead, was meant to strengthen His manhood for His cross ; but it also carries the lessons that that decease is the centre of His work, that law and prophets pointed to it, and that all the dim regions of the holy dead were moved with expectation, and waited, "prisoners of hope," for the accomplishment of the long-delayed redemption. The voice from heaven was like the herald's proclamation bidding all men listen to the Son, as to the Father, and so setting the King's authority on

the highest pinnacle, and paralleling it with the authority of God. The vanishing of the attendant mighty ones leaves His figure erect and solitary, as the one Lord both of the dead and the living, the King of men, to whom the ages that had gone before and they that followed after are equally to cry "Hosanna!"

There can be nothing beyond this but the revelation on the cross ; therefore, having reached this high-water mark, our lessons leave the portraiture of the King, and turn to that of His subjects. The next four lessons (XXXI.—XXXIV.) present it in various aspects. We may gather them together, as the laws of the kingdom, and the conditions of precedence in it. First comes the teaching that this kingdom is a kingdom of little children, those souls which have learned their smallness and weakness, and by lowliness have become fit to pass in. Christ's paradox is that lowliness is loftiness, that to go down is the road up. If we become as little children, we shall have hearts open for all the other children, and hence the next command is to "receive" the little ones. Whoever does not receive will cause them to "stumble" ; therefore the warning follows of the fate of such a one. And if we are occasions of stumbling to ourselves, we shall infallibly be so to others ; hence the stringent command of self-mutilation, if needful, to keep a clean conscience. And as the little ones are sinned against by despising them, and that is the besetting sin of those who are not themselves as little children, the exhortation ends with setting forth their preciousness in God's eyes, and proposes the Divine example, which seeks after the least lost sheep, as the pattern for us. The subjects are to be like the lowly King, who came to seek and to save the humblest.

The parable of the two debtors (Lesson XXXII.) adds forgivingness to humility, as the royal livery. Here Christ, as it were, stands aside, and presents "My heavenly Father" as the King, and as the Pattern for the subjects. The infinite smallness of any offences of men against men contrasted with the greatness of every man's offences against God, the compassion moving in the Divine heart, the frank forgiveness, the strange fact that a man, who owes everything to God's mercy, has sometimes no mercy on his fellow, and the solemn thought that unforgivingness rebinds pardoned sin upon a man, are the main points of the parable. Boundless pardon like God's is the duty of all Christ's subjects. The story of the young ruler passes from parable to fact. It teaches that absolute and entire self-surrender, with the consecration of all possessions, is imperative on all, and that such surrender and consecration are not valuable in themselves, but as means to the end, which is all-important—namely, the following of Jesus Christ. "Follow me" is the command for the subjects. "Sell all that thou hast" is but putting off the encumbering garments that we may follow.

Lesson XXXIV., the account of the foolish wish for precedence in the kingdom, gives a final trait in the character of Christ's subjects. Service is dignity. There are places next the throne, and these are filled by those who minister the most to others. The distinction between this lesson and that about the little ones is that there our Lord inculcated lowliness of disposition, and here He enjoins readiness to serve, which is the fruit of such lowliness. On the whole, these four, lowliness, forgivingness self-surrender in order to following, and diligent

ministry, are the broad outlines of the Christian character, and are all laid upon our consciences by His word, and commended by His example. Such is the kingdom, and such is its King.

We can add but a word as to Lessons XXXV., XXXVI. The royal entry into Jerusalem opens up yet more deeply the gentleness of Christ as King, and the manner of His dominion. The simple pomp, the borrowed ass, the tears on Christ's cheeks, the cleansed temple, the healed cripples, the fresh trebles of the children's hosannas, and the smile on His face, as He listened, all proclaim what manner of Prince of the house of David this is ; for once recognition attends Him, and glad shouts of willing subjects surge round Him as He sits on the ass's colt. It is a symbol and a prophecy.

But as ever, close by the brightness lies the blackness. The parable of the dishonest vine-dressers shows how He estimated at its due worth the fleeting enthusiasm of the crowd, and tells in thinly veiled guise the sad story of that century-long tragedy, of which the crisis was at hand.

With sorrowful certainty and patient submission He recounts His own death as an accomplished fact. With majestic self-consciousness, He claims in the plainest fashion to be the foundation laid by God, and warns that whosoever rejects Him ruins himself. The King stands forth in the mystery of His passion and glory in the fateful words which sealed the nation's fate, and transferred the kingdom to the Gentiles. The unique double consciousness of His sovereign dignity and of His certain death speaks with clearness in this parable ; for He tells of the slaying of the son, and of the casting out of the

slayers, and, lest any should miss understanding Him, asserts Himself to be the stone on which to build is to be safe, on which to stumble is to be maimed, beneath which to be crushed (as all who reject Him will be) is to be ground to powder.

LESSON XLIX.

Review Lesson Thoughts.

MATTHEW xxii.-xxviii.

THE first thing to be noted in reviewing these lessons is that, with the exception of the last, they are all included between a Tuesday and a Sunday. The first six cover but part of one day. The next four extend over less than twenty-four hours. If Matthew's Gospel were to be judged by the rules of ordinary biographies, it is ill-proportioned. The scale alters as the story advances. Months are passed over lightly in the beginning, but in the end it becomes a diary, and carefully describes every hour, and we had almost said moment. What is the meaning of this diversity in the treatment of the life and of the death? If that death were simply the noble and pathetic close of a martyr-hero's career, however touching and beautiful it may be, it was not worth while to draw out the record at such length. We could well have spared some of its details, to have had more of His life of wisdom and beneficence. The very scale of the narrative (which is alike in all the Gospels) witnesses that the death of Jesus stands in a different relation to His work from that in which the deaths of other teachers and saints stand to theirs. When they

die they add nothing but tender memories, or bright examples of fortitude, to what they have done by their lives ; but Christ's death is the very centre of His work, and the fountain of the world's life. Therefore, each drop of sweat and blood is counted, because, as they slowly and heavily fall, they are the ransom for sin. There is no characteristic of Scripture biography more constant than the careless brevity of its accounts of the deaths of God's greatest saints. They often, indeed, drop out of the narratives unnoticed ; but even when their decease is recorded, a sentence or a clause is all that is spared to it. But this one death fills pages, in plain attestation that He was not as other men, and that His death had blessing for us, all its own.

Note, again, that the first six lessons are occupied with various aspects of one thought,—that of retributive judgment, to be exercised by Christ. The all but exclusive prominence given to that solemn thought is a new characteristic in our Lord's latest teaching, but the thought is not new. It is to be found in the Sermon on the Mount, in which He plainly enough declared Himself to be the Judge of men, and spoke of trees cast into the fire, and of houses overwhelmed, because built on sand. It reappears in many another part of His earlier teaching, but reaches its full development, as was natural, in these last moments, when He still strove, with His last breath, to rouse careless hearts. Jesus Christ used the argument of reasonable fear, and set the example of appealing to “the terror of the Lord,” that He might “persuade men.” With these chapters before us we ought not to think the gospel is fully preached, if the wrath from which it delivers is suppressed, or that lips

into which grace is poured are less gracious when they foretell judgment and penalty, in order that we may not incur them, than when they breathe the music of infinite love and an opened heaven. Jesus Christ echoed and enlarged the fiery proclamation of the Baptist in His parting words. Let us learn the significance of the fact, and not fancy a contradiction, where He saw none, between the Christ that redeems and the Christ that judges.

The first and second lessons refer more especially to the Jewish nation ; the third, fourth, and fifth to the members of the kingdom ; the sixth to both, and to all mankind. In all, Jesus stands forth as the King and Judge. The parable of the marriage feast is saturated with references to the Old Testament. The king's son reminds us of the second and seventy-second Psalms ; the marriage, of the forty-fifth, and of many a tender allusion in Isaiah, Hosea, and others. The feast recalls Isaiah's great prophecy of the feast of fat things (chap. xxv.), and the call of Wisdom to her banquet, in Proverbs. The message put into the servants' mouths is evidently drawn from her hospitable words. The parable teaches that God's loving call to the abundance of His table falls dead on hearts filled with earthly interests, that refusal brings destruction, that for Israel to turn from Him is national ruin, that their prerogatives will be transferred to others, and that God's purpose will not be balked. But it has also its solemn warning for Israel's successors. The parable within the parable teaches that to accept the invitation without putting on the garment of purity is a worse offence than to reject the call, and that none can sit at that table except they are fittingly attired. So

the parable is heavy with a twofold judgment, and warns against a double way of receiving the grace of God in vain.

In the thirty-eighth lesson the King sadly leaves rulers and people. It is one of the turning-points of Scripture, the end of centuries of training, and, if we might venture to say so, the end of a divine hope, and the apparent defeat of a divine purpose. We see an unfamiliar side of Christ's character in it, and, as we listen to the stern words, each like the cut of the whip of small cords, and then pass to the deep pathos and tearful voice of the lament over loved and rebellious Jerusalem, in which yearning and righteous retribution blend so strangely, neither hindering the full force of the other, we come to understand a little of what may be meant by "the wrath of the Lamb."

In the thirty-ninth, fortieth, and forty-first lessons we pass to warnings of judgment, as affecting the members of the kingdom. Common to them all are the emphatic prominence given to Christ as Judge, His coming again in royal state, the delay and suddenness of His return, the parting of the apparent subjects of the kingdom into two companies, one made sharers in the rule and heritage of the King, one sent out into a horrible night of weeping. Thus, reiterated and unmistakable are Christ's final words of witness to His professing Church. If we neglect them our blood is on our own heads. He "saw the sword coming," He knew that He Himself was to wield it; He "blew the trumpet." It is ours to "take warning." The thirty-ninth lesson insists in general terms on the necessity for watchfulness; and, in the compressed parable or extended metaphor of the wise and evil

servants, brings out the effect of watchfulness and of its opposite, in diligent stewardship within the household or masterful tyranny there, with sensual indulgence.

The fortieth lesson, the parable of the ten virgins, sets the duties of the Church, in the absence of its Lord, in another light. His return is imperfectly represented by the image of a master coming to his servants ; He is also the Bridegroom coming for His bride, and both emblems, of bride and of attendant maidens, refer to the collective Church. The special addition made by this parable to the general truth, common to all, is the need for inward grace, the oil of the spirit in the heart, as well as for the outward signs of the Christian life. To this are added the warnings that it is possible to go on unsuspecting that we have no real, inward vitality, until the cry that He comes falls on our startled ears, and that the void discovered then is discovered too late.

The parable of the talents brings in additional elements. The children of the kingdom have not only to be faithful stewards within the household, nor only to tend the flame of outward obedience by the continual reception of supplies of inward life from the Lord of life, but they are to be traders for Him, increasing His wealth. Wide diversity of endowment is consistent with equality of diligence and of gains ; and the same praise and reward are showered on the more slenderly gifted as on the more richly endowed, if their diligence has been the same. This Commander does not give larger rewards to the superior officers, and a poor dollar or two to the privates, but all who fought with the same bravery receive the same medal. Commonplace Christians with no particular brilliancy of gifts may take heart, and

peacefully “fill their narrow round.” The plea of the idle servant here is not “My lord delayeth his coming,” but a far more radical doubt touching the Master’s character. If we think of Him as hard, and of His commands as burdens, we shall be smitten with paralysis. The sense of His infinite bestowals is the spring of service, though the thought of the account to be given is a spur. As the crime is greater, the punishment is more severe. The exclusion and darkness and sorrow are the same ; but the loss of unused talents is added, and that not only because they were not employed, but because the Giver’s character had been fatally misread, and fear had cast out love.

Lesson XLII., though it has its own difficulties, gathers up all the preceding in still plainer words. It has parabolic elements ; but the assertions that Christ shall come as Judge, that He shall be revealed as King, that the whole race shall be gathered at His tribunal, that He, by His own unerring glance, shall part men into two companies, and that these shall pass from His bar into endless light or darkness, are not parables. There is no reference now to watchfulness. The principle of the judgment is stated in the most general form, as being a judgment according to deeds, and, of these, acts of pure beneficence are set at the head. We have to listen to other words to learn how such deeds may grow from the barren soil of human nature. The lesson of this, the last of Christ’s words to the world, is that men are judged by their works whether they be good or bad.

What a contrast between these majestic and terrible predictions and the realities of the present, to which the next lesson brings us back, and how Gethsemane and

the cross must have seemed to shatter the former! If we would understand anything of the passion of Jesus, we must look at it in the light of the preceding lessons, and remember that the Sufferer is the King and Judge of men. The Lord's Supper casts light on Christ's own conception of His relation to the past revelation, inasmuch as He therein sets aside the divinely appointed memorial of national deliverance, and substitutes the remembrance of Himself, and inasmuch as He gives His body and blood as the true Passover sacrifice; thus claiming to be that of which that earlier deliverance and that sheltering blood were but shadowy predictions. It casts light on His own estimate of His work, inasmuch as He desired that His death should be for ever remembered, and set forth His broken body as the food and His shed blood as the life-giving wine for the world. It casts light on the mutual relation of believers, inasmuch as it is a family meal, and on their common relation to Him who is the Master of the house. It casts light on the future, inasmuch as it points onward to the perfect feast, where He drinks with us the new wine of the kingdom. It is thus a memorial of the one fact to be ever borne on grateful hearts, as the source of all peace; the symbol of our true life in the present, and the prophecy of unbroken and completed union in the future.

Lesson XLIV. opens for our reverent gaze the Holy of Holies, which is profaned by much speaking, as we look. But we may discern by the uncertain light that finds its way beneath the quivering olives, a prostrate form, and with awe remember that it is the King and Judge of all, whose agony is all for our sakes, and who wins His

kingdom by His pains. Two great truths may be graven on our hearts, as we silently gaze—that the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and that for us, as for Him, submission is victory, and a will resigned is an over-coming will.

The evangelist breaks the current of his narrative to tell of Peter's fall. Why should that have been imbedded in such a place? Would it not have been better to have gone on with the history, and let the interrupting episode alone? No doubt it added another drop of bitterness to the cup, but probably the reason for its insertion is the precious lesson of humility and self-distrust which it teaches, and the measure of Christ's forgiving mercy and restoring grace which it supplies.

Matthew's account of the crucifixion is remarkable for its reticence as to our Lord's words and deeds. As we have formerly pointed out, it only gives one saying, and one act. It fixes our attention on the mechanical routine of the soldiers' work, and especially on the unconscious witness which they bore to His royalty, in their jeering title over His thorn-crowned head. It then records the bitter malignity of His own people, and the unconscious witness to His saving compassion, His royal claims, and His trust in God, which their poison-dropping lips had to bear. Then it shows us for a moment the cross looming through the darkness, and bids us listen with awe and thankfulness to the cry, so strangely compacted of trust and desolation, which partly reveals the separation from God which He endured as the consequence of His true taking on Him of the sins of the world. One more loud cry, which witnessed that He did not die from failing strength, and the redemption is

complete. "The King is dead. Long live the King!" In death He conquers death, establishes His dominion, proves Himself the Lord of death and the Giver of life, and reaches the zenith of His glory in the lowest depth of His humiliation.

Lessons XLVI. and XLVII. are closely connected. Matthew's narrative of the resurrection is condensed, and deals with three points,—the fact of the resurrection, in regard to which He has no details bearing on the nature of our Lord's risen body, nor on his intercourse with the disciples in Jerusalem. His story turns its back on the city no longer holy. Since He had said, "Your house is left unto you desolate . . . ye shall not see Me . . . till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." So we have but the fact of the resurrection, with the evidence of it in Christ's single appearance to the women, and pass at once to the last sad obstinate unbelief which petrifies the nation in its attitude of rejection. The chosen people, for whom Jesus had laboured so lovingly and patiently, disappear, bribing Gentiles to conspire in a lie against their King, and turning away from the light that streamed from the empty grave.

The companion picture is that of the gathered subjects of the risen King, on the free mountain side, in simple, despised Galilee, far away from the faithless city that lodged murderers. The glory that had been rejected from Zion shines now on a nameless hill. The King, for whom the only throne that Israel would provide was a cross, stands glorified, and on His way to greater glory, and, ere the curtain falls, utters a claim, a command, and a promise, each of which throbs with conscious and

manifest divinity. Our Gospel began in the valley, with its story of the birth, though even then gleams of His kingly dignity flitted across the page. It ends on the highest summit, from which it is but a short flight upwards to the throne. Universal monarchy, therefore a message of joy for all nations, and a presence everywhere and for ever, are the last assurances of the risen King to every generation. Let us make them ours by our faith, and bow before Him with the ancient confession, "Thou art the King of glory, O Christ."

THE END.



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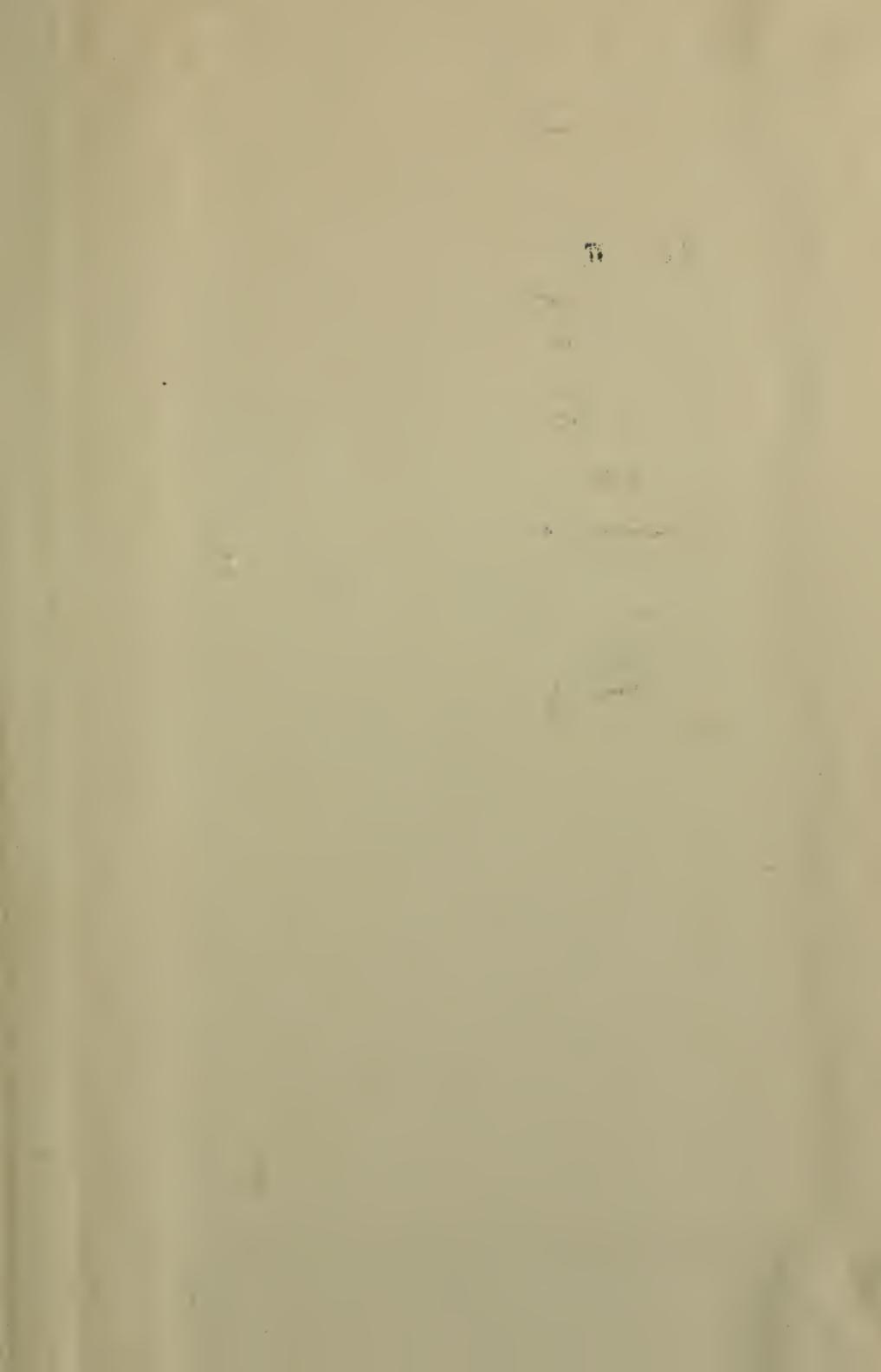
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